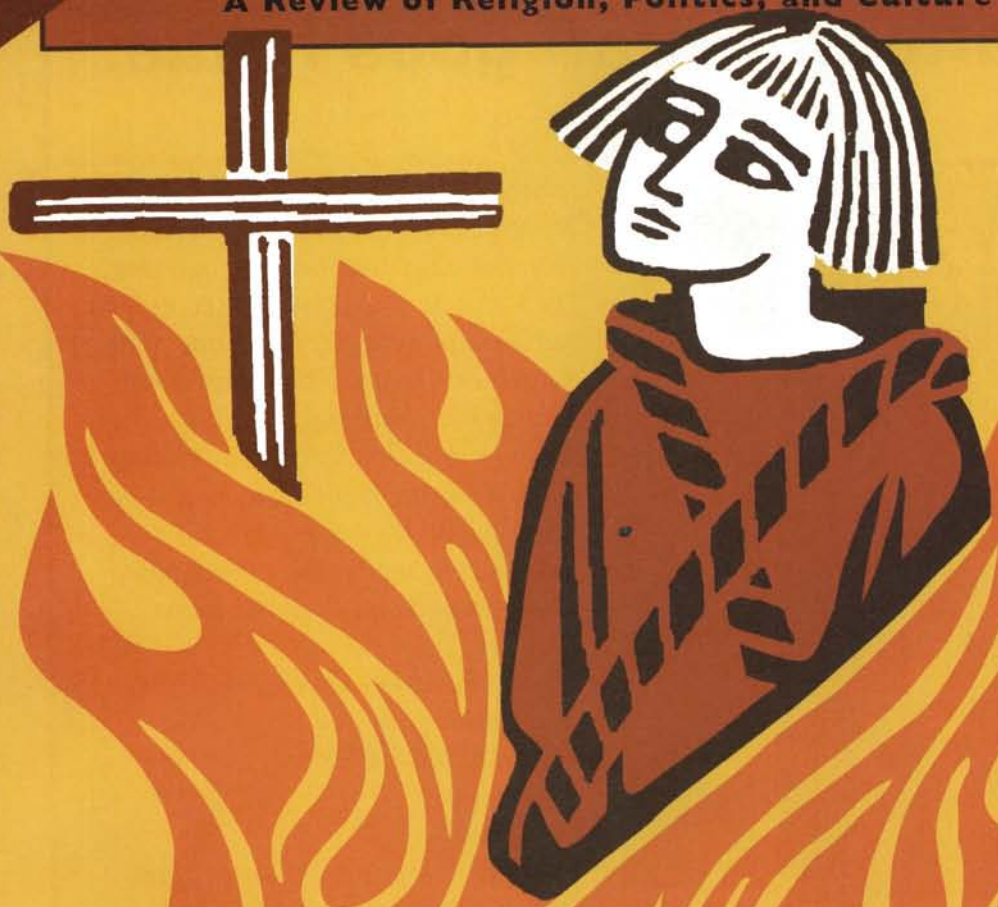
RELIGION BOOKS

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

March 10, 2000



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The Church in Ireland

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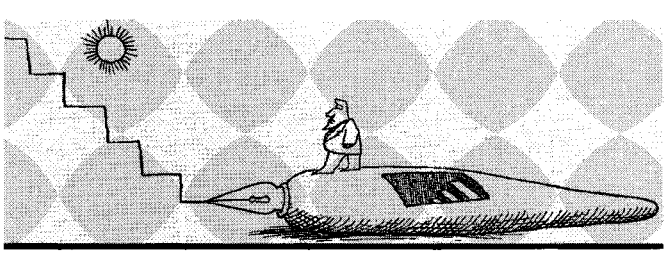

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To the Editors

Without religion

I'd like to respond to William Pfaff's thoughtful commentary ["Lonely New World," January 28]. While it may be true that a significant decline or even absence of belief in a divine master marks our age, I'm not certain we can assume that will automatically translate into poorer behavior. If Pfaff's assertion—that more than twenty centuries of Western history have been marked by such a belief—is true, we might well hope for change. The period is stained in blood. Leaders of every stripe have demonstrated a thirst for power, heedless of religious or humanitarian propriety. An age stripped of these "transcendent" values might at least work without hypocrisy.

ROBERT HANNON
Fairbanks, Alaska

Back to the Mount

Let me see if I correctly understand William L. Portier's defense of the Mount Saint Mary's seminarians [February 11]:

The U.S. church now finds itself in a pluralistic society, a situation that came about only after the relatively recent dissolution of the Catholic immigrant subculture. The church must respond to this new challenge by adopting a new approach to engaging the world, namely evangelical witness of the sort pioneered by American Baptists and Methodists in the nineteenth century. This is a form of Christianity "especially fitted to modern social and cultural conditions, especially pluralism." We are not told why it is especially fitted but, because it is, Catholics should be "investing significantly in dramatic forms of religious witness that go beyond the example of a good life in the world." The seminarians in question have for some time been exploring this new and more relevant way of being Catholic, and that's why we should not think of them as conservatives or fugitives from the world.

Portier supports this reading with examples of the seminarians' evangelical behavior: wearing a Roman collar; wearing a cassock and surplice; swinging a thurible in a 180-degree arc; touching the floor with one's head during Mass; saying grace before meals individually instead of as a community. This last, by the way, is "an act of piety...intended to be witnessed." Presumably, therefore, the other activities are as well. In any case, this list is Portier's proof that the seminarians are in the vanguard of a new Catholicism, one more appropriate to engaging our surrounding, pluralistic culture.

Historians no doubt will agree that pluralism has been part of the environment of the U.S. church since the dominant immigrant subculture of Catholicism ended. They will want to add, however, that pluralism was a factor in the church's environment before and during the immigrant era as well, so it is not a new challenge. Baptists and Methodists may be surprised to hear Portier imply that distinctive garb and intentionally ostentatious devotionalism are modern expressions of their ancestors' type of religious witness. And Catholics may wonder why any kind of garb, posture, or gesture—all of which are superficial by nature and unrelated to either the gospel or the core doctrines of Catholicism—should be thought of as evangelism. In short, Portier has yet to make his case.

JOHN HAZARD
Downers Grove, Ill.

Charming Alice

Alice McDermott's "Confessions of a Reluctant Catholic" [February 11] is an excellent portrayal of the changes in her outlook and practice of Catholicism during the changes in the Catholic church in recent decades. My generation and others with a Catholic college education shared her antipathy to the religious mannerisms so well described in her article and in her novel, *Charming Billy*. Despite changes in the church and the modernization of religious practices, the defection of youth, and others, continues.

(Continued on page 43)

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Primary politics

Cats will finally close on Broadway, the "real life" match made on TV's "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?" has ended in annulment and welcome fiasco, and Arizona Senator John McCain's bid for the Republican presidential nomination is still alive. Who says there is no God?

Whatever one's politics or party affiliation, it is hard not to be encouraged, even inspired, by Senator McCain's victories last month in the Michigan and Arizona primaries. Only days after Texas Governor George W. Bush had rallied the Religious Right and other conservative Republicans to his cause and to victory in South Carolina, McCain triumphed in Michigan despite the strenuous efforts of the Republican party establishment to drive a stake through the heart of his "insurgency." Winning two-thirds of the votes of independents and Democrats in Michigan's open primary, McCain once again demonstrated that he possesses the kind of crossover appeal needed to win the White House. Bush, who rushed into the arms of the Reverend Pat Robertson and other social conservatives to secure a victory in South Carolina, must now extricate himself from the divisive politics of the right wing of his party. Catholics, it appears, were particularly offended by Bush's willingness to turn a blind eye to the anti-Catholic and racialist policies of Bob Jones University in South Carolina. It is clear that the swing voters who decide presidential elections—many of them Catholics—will reject candidates associated with the harsh rhetoric of the culture wars. Nevertheless, the Republican party's ability to nominate someone not compromised by the ideological Right is very much an open question.

In the upcoming March 7 primaries, stretching from New York to California, victory will be determined for the most part by the votes of registered Republicans. Bush, with the overwhelming backing of Republican governors and congressmen, remains the odds-on favorite to capture the nomination. Still, McCain has not yet gotten a full hearing from Republican voters. Although his advocacy of campaign-finance reform and his preference for paying down the national debt rather than making large tax cuts flies in the face of party orthodoxy, it is hard to imagine that Bush's attempts to paint the Arizona senator as a "liberal" or a Trojan horse for the Democrats can work in the long run. By almost any measure, McCain is ideologically very conservative. Whether it is the minimum wage, defense spending, the environment, unions, taxes, or abortion, he lines up well to the right. He was a staunch supporter, after all, of Texas Republican Phil Gramm's presidential candidacy in 1996. If McCain can get these facts out to Republicans in the next few weeks, Bush may find himself relaxing in his beloved Texas come fall.

The vicious infighting in the Republican party is fascinating to a degree, but it should not obscure the larger significance of McCain's candidacy. There is something undeniably fresh and even unpredictable about this self-described maverick. Furthermore, he has done something that many thought impossible: he has reinvigorated the whole political process (and in the process drained much of the interest from Bill Bradley's challenge to Al Gore). Voters turned out in record numbers in New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Michigan. Even better, many coming out to support McCain were young or first-time voters. In an era whose culture

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Correction ■ In the February 11 issue listing the Commonweal Associates, we failed to include Gale and Angela Metzger of New Jersey. Our apologies to these generous Benefactors.

seems to be characterized by obscene spectacles like "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?"—and where politicians are held in almost universally low esteem—this renewed interest in the politics of self-government is a hopeful sign. Yes, this is personality- (or "character-") driven politics, but McCain's message touches on something more than Clinton-style empathy or Ross Perot's denigration of government.

To his credit, McCain has spoken to voters' idealism, explicitly calling for a politics that transcends self-interest, that embraces duties as much as rights. In foreign affairs, for example, he has been forthright in saying that the United States has moral obligations to act in the defense of human rights, even outside the spheres of our immediate national interest. "Although the locus of the change we are calling for is our campaign-finance system," McCain has said, "this crusade is about much more than changing how we pay for our campaigns. It's about changing how we view our democracy."

Exactly how McCain would change our democracy as president is something voters must learn a good deal more about. Campaign-finance reform is a popular issue in the abstract, but as previous reforms have shown, it is a very complicated business fraught with unforeseen consequences. Beyond campaign reform, much of McCain's agenda remains vague and even slapdash. But whatever Republicans or American voters at large finally decide about Senator McCain's candidacy, he has already done a great deal to remind us of why democracy matters, and why politics is worthy of something more than our apathy or cynicism. For that, even George W. Bush, Al Gore, and Bill Bradley ought to be grateful.

"You want to run a principled campaign?—
I'm afraid that gimmick's been tried already."

RICHARD McCORMICK, R.I.P.

Richard McCormick, S.J., died last month at the age of seventy-seven. Widely regarded as the most influential contemporary American moral theologian, McCormick's work was a model of intellectual precision and integrity. Famous for his resonant smoker's voice, ready laugh, and unpretentious manner, McCormick was a beloved mentor to dozens of younger colleagues. From 1965 to 1984 he wrote the influential "Notes on Moral Theology" for the scholarly journal *Theological Studies*, and in doing so was always careful to present the best arguments of those with whom he disagreed. After years as a Jesuit seminary instructor, he taught at the Kennedy Center for Bioethics at Georgetown, finishing his academic career as the John A. O'Brien Professor of Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame. He was a nationally recognized authority on bioethics, an articulate defender of the church's opposition to abortion and euthanasia, and a pioneering figure in the renewal of Catholic moral theology in the aftermath of Vatican II. *Commonweal* readers have been familiar with his byline since 1964, when he first appeared here writing on the question of "marital morality." His last piece for the magazine (August 14, 1998) laid out, in his customarily direct and succinct style, his principled opposition to "punishing dissent" in the church.

McCormick was an outspoken defender of "conscientious dissent" from church teachings on contraception, certain aspects of sexual morality, and prohibitions against *in vitro* fertilization. Steeped in the church's tradition, deeply devoted to the priesthood, he was commited to honest debate on disputed questions. Never eager to pick a fight with the magisterium or the conservative Catholic activists who made him an object of their scrutiny, neither did he shy away from one. He believed, above all, that church teaching had to be defended in rational argument, not merely by appeals to authority. He exhibited on all occasions that very Catholic conviction that reason and faith need not contradict one another. In the last years of his life, McCormick spoke out bravely about what he described as the "coercive atmosphere" in which Catholic moral theologians must now work. In his 1998 *Commonweal* article, he quoted John XXIII on how the church should best deal with the possibility of theological error. "The church," John wrote, "has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations."

Few theologians were as proficient at demonstrating the validity of the Catholic moral tradition as Richard McCormick, and fewer still, perhaps, as good at applying the "medicine of mercy" to the intellectual challenges we face. He will not soon be replaced, but, we trust, his work—that conveyed his spirit—will continue to bear much fruit.

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JOHN GARVEY

THE BIBLE & THE BIG BANG

They don't have to jibe

There is a kind of wavering faith, if not bad faith, that religious people often bring to discussions of science and religion. "The Bible is not a scientific text," we solemnly intone, and then are pathetically grateful when something like the Big Bang theory looks so, well, biblical. The science that indicates the possibility that the earth is uniquely fit, in all the universe, to host complex forms of life is also comforting to some believers.

We are appropriately irritated when prominent physicists reject belief with sophomoric appeals to the problem of evil (the good suffer, therefore there is no God, because if he existed he would fix those Nazis); but New Age writers who bend science to make subatomic physics seem to echo the teaching of the Buddha or Christian mystics do an equally simple-minded job on science, and too many of us love it.

One widespread assumption is that science, since the Enlightenment, has challenged religious belief in an unprecedented way. The picture we are given is this: Until Galileo (or Copernicus, or Darwin), our ancestors believed in a small universe with a large earth at the center and a tiny surrounding nest of spheres where stars and planets revolved, and then came science, challenging the central place of humanity, and between them evolution and physics made it possible to conceive of a universe that could be explained without God.

There are some important half-truths here, but they are half-truths. One of them is the uniqueness of our situation. Some of the ancients, while believing in a geocentric universe, did know that the earth was comparatively tiny; and there have been atheistic approaches to science, and efforts to explain the universe without recourse to divine design, since before the time of Christ. One corner we painted ourselves into was accepting an Aristotelian approach to divinity, with a prime mover. (We avoided the Neo-Platonic divinity, with its Demiurge, as too gnostic, though we did accept a more or less Platonic approach to the soul as something potentially detachable from the inferior flesh.) In both the popular and the philosophical Christian imagination we moved away from the strange God of the Bible toward a more Greek understanding. This movement is somewhat understandable when we are debating the reasonableness of belief, or at least trying to make it look not unreasonable, with people who accept a similar world view. We should not, however, equate this attempt at dialogue with Christian dogma, or the idea of the uncaused cause, or the prime mover, with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus.

A static view of religious understanding also must be challenged. Reinterpretation has been part of being a believer in the God of the Bible from the time the Hebrew Bible was first pulled together, and the attempt was made to see what God is trying to tell us. (The first great leap of faith is to think that God is trying to get anything through to us at all.) Given God's promises, for example, the Babylonian captivity was not supposed to happen. The prophets had to move the story forward, taking this apparent impossibility into account, revealing a continuity that was not at all obvious. By the same token, the revelation of Jesus as the only Messiah upset all expectations, and revealed something about God's relationship to us that could not otherwise have been known; it required a radical reinterpretation of what preceded it. That the savior of all, the light of Israel, would be revealed as a man who died a shameful death was not something we would have expected, to say the least. New readings are part of the process.

But to what extent does this apply to our encounter with science? In a recent issue of *Commonweal*, John F. Haught says, "A theology obsessed with order and design is, I believe, ill-prepared for evolution" ("Evolution and God's Humility," January 28). True enough; and it is important to stress the fact that our

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understanding of God's power tends to be distorted by such notions as God as designer, playwright, punishing parent, one-who-would-do-what-I-would-do-if-I-were-in-charge-of-this-mess, etc. God's revelation always upsets the ideas we want to have of God. We look for him in mighty displays of power, and he is found in the "still, small voice." The power that created the universe from nothing is revealed most completely on the cross. Our ideas of power, creation, sustaining—all of those things we believe God to do—are not, apparently, God's ideas of the same things.

I would like, however, to challenge the idea that we need a theology that is prepared for evolution, subatomic physics, or cosmology. Look, for example, at the joy some believers take in the Big Bang theory. What if it were to fall apart, and a version of the universe as eternal, with no beginning in time, perhaps forever expanding, then imploding, then expanding again (as Hindu cosmology would have it) were to gain ascendancy? Would the Judeo-Christian idea of creation be challenged in any serious way? Not unless you want some scientific validation for something that was never a scientific statement in the first place. The universe does not need to have a beginning in time for the doctrine of creation to be true. What the teaching says, finally, is that without God there is nothing, that God is responsible for everything that is. How the universe came to be what it is, physically, is not a matter for theology, and we should not look to science for theological consolation. If there seems to be correspondence between the Big Bang theory and the biblical doctrine of creation, it is what Wittgenstein called a "charming" idea, but it isn't very important.

Religious understanding is different in kind from scientific understanding, and we should not be shy about pointing out the inherent limitations of science. It is finally about those things that can be replicated experimentally, weighed, and counted. Apologists for what amounts to the religion of scientism (the late Carl Sagan, for example) like to say that it is the only way we have of really knowing anything. It is true that there is a limited certainty available here, but it does not apply to anything that matters most to us. I cannot be sure that my wife loves me in the same way I can be sure that the sun will rise tomorrow—that is, I can convince myself that she is trying to fool me, that it is all a plot, that her motives are not what they seem. Of course, this would be madness. When theology looks at the world for clues about God's presence, all it can ever find, this side of the end, are clues, hints, things that may be so. We hope they are; we count on it. We put ourselves at the service of a story that begins with creation and ends with resurrection. It can't be proven.

Science is about the ever-more accurate description of a limited (but enormous) range of phenomena. The realm of theology requires belief—and this is why those who claim that it can be taught as well by an unbeliever as by a believer seem to me to be seriously tone-deaf. Belief opens us to something that cannot be proven. It is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen" (Hebrews 11: 1). There is something necessarily incomplete about it, but this is not to say that nothing is sensed, or known in any way. At the end of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein wrote, "It is not how the world is, but that it is, that is mystical." Science is about the "how"; it cannot touch the "that-ness." □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE, Jr.

VOUCHERS

Let's have a real debate

Political reporters are trashed so regularly for loving horse races, polling, and in-the-other-guy's-face conflict that it's worth celebrating moments when journalists question candidates about what we like to call "real issues."

In the midst of the acrimonious confrontation between Al Gore and Bill Bradley at the Apollo Theater in Harlem last month, Tamala Edwards of *Time* magazine noted the support among African-Americans for school vouchers and also that Gore and his children "are the product of private institutions."

"Is there not a public or charter school in D.C. good enough for your child? And, if not..." here she was interrupted by applause, "why should the parents here have to keep their kids in public schools because they don't have the financial resources that you do?"

Later, Jeff Greenfield of CNN pressed the point. "When the public schools fail our children," he said, referring to affluent parents, "we don't wait for new legislation. We protect our kids' future by pulling them out of those public schools. There are tens of thousands of parents, disproportionately black and brown, who do not have that choice....Why shouldn't these parents conclude that the Democratic party's opposition to choice is an example of supporting a special interest rather than their interest?" Neither Gore nor Bradley was about to embrace vouchers. But the Edwards-Greenfield moment should not be the last time the voucher question is joined. In this debate the opposing sides rarely address the other's best arguments.

The best argument for vouchers was framed nicely by Edwards and Greenfield: Most parents will do anything in their power to give their children a better education. But, as Greenfield said, poor parents can't afford private schools. And as Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley has said, even the most sincere promise to fix an ailing school system in ten years doesn't sound very good to the parent of an eight-year-old. In ten years, the child is out of the system.

What might be called the guilty-conscience argument says to well-off parents: If the parents of poor children can find a better school, doesn't a sense of social justice demand this parent be given a

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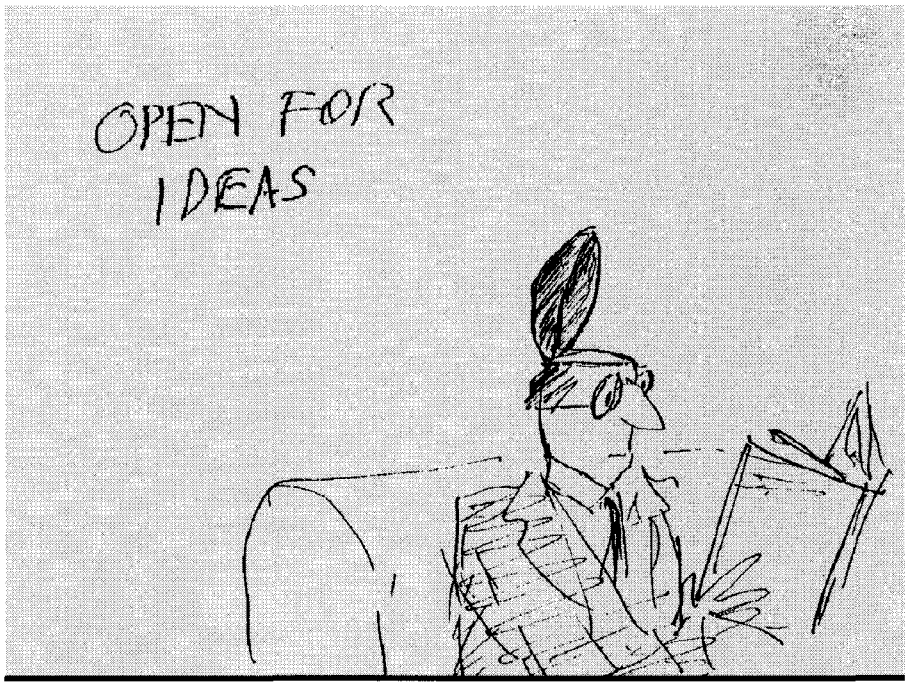
choice and a chance? What is wrong with vouchers for the poorest children in the most broken school systems?

The usual reply from voucher opponents might be called the supply argument. Yes, in some cities, there are alternative schools—usually Catholic schools—whose tuitions are within the reach of what a voucher could pay for. But voucher advocates, their opponents say, are wrong to pretend that the K-12 education market is like every other market. Starting new schools is difficult and expensive. Vouchers will not lead miraculously to the creation of thousands of new and vibrant schools. Educating the poorest children in our society is not necessarily work that profit-making institutions would take on. Vouchers are thus a false promise if they're offered as an alternative to public school reform.



Now consider this possibility: Both these arguments are correct. As a safety valve for parents who desperately need alternatives to schools in catastrophic condition, vouchers may work as a short-term balm, and as a prod to reform. But they are no substitute for fixing the public schools, and there is no cheap or easy way to do that. Education Secretary Richard Riley was right in his State of American Education speech last month to underscore one unintended consequence of the booming economy: Rewards for new college graduates are now so high in the private sector that potentially good teachers are bid away from the teaching market. Riley's innovation was to suggest that teaching be turned into a full-year, and better-paid, profession.

The problem is especially grave for math and science teachers. An education department official offered these numbers: The average first-year teacher's salary is $25,735. But new college grads who go into computing can earn an average of $40,920; in engineering, average starting pay is $42,862. The gap grows over time. Experienced teachers average $39,347; a computer systems analyst earns $63,072. Voucher advocates who say they believe in market economics cannot deny what market logic tells us: We need higher pay for teachers, especially for specialists, in exchange for more rigorous standards.

But voucher opponents need better answers than they've come up with to the urgent questions Edwards and Greenfield asked. Guilt is not an education policy. But if we don't feel guilty about what's happening to some of our poorest children, there's something wrong with our consciences. □

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John Horgan

CATHOLIC IRELAND

Sex, lies & accountability

The allegation, made in a new biography of John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin from 1940 to 1972, that this most powerful prelate in twentieth-century Ireland was a pedophile, has poured salt into an open wound in the Catholic church in Ireland. That wound was opened only in the past couple of years, but as yet it shows no sign of healing. The allegation is not well documented, but it is a measure of the controversy that swirled around McQuaid during his life that even an anonymous accusation (which, in effect, this is) has introduced a wide new seam of debate. Many well-known liberals, who engaged in fierce critiques of McQuaid while he was alive, have attacked the biographer's use of anonymous sources.

The fuss about the accuracy of the allegations continues apace, as the biography has been widely serialized. But many of the faithful, concluding that there is no smoke without fire, are simply averting their gaze in mute despair. Underlying this despair—mixed, on occasion, with anger—is a series of scandals involving physical and sexual abuse in church-run institutions which add up to a crisis of credibility in the institutional church.

Public and media interest in this hitherto unexplored area of Irish church life was given a major boost with the publication before Christmas of *Suffer the Little Children* (New Island Books), by two researchers—also the subject of a TV

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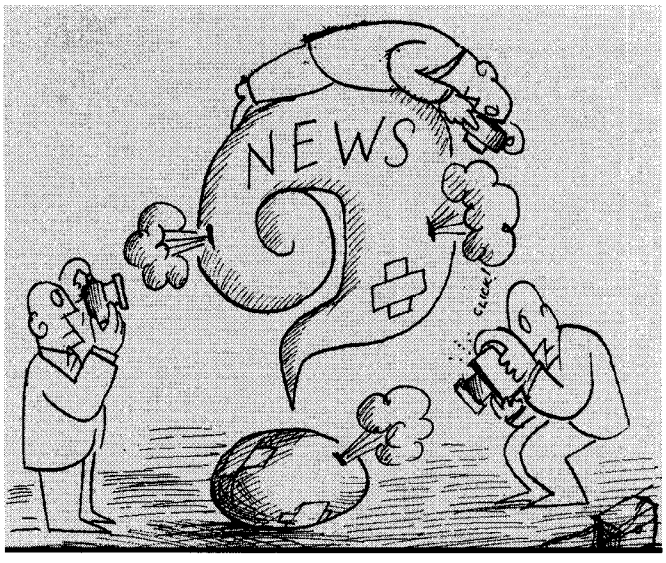

documentary—enumerating incidents of sexual and physical abuse in church-run institutions. Added to the growing material prosperity and secularization which are already undermining traditional religious loyalties and practices in Ireland, these revelations have contributed to a general air of impending, if not actual, crisis in the church.

The crisis of confidence among many priests and religious is palpable. They now feel deeply troubled by the continuing stream of revelations, and are all but terrified of showing friendship or affection in any physical manner to young people with whom their work brings them into contact.

The bishops have been stung by repeated allegations that they failed to fulfill their pastoral responsibilities adequately. In the light of allegations that complaints about some abusing priests had merely resulted in their being moved to pastoral duties elsewhere, the bishops, like their American counterparts before them, have now drawn up detailed guidelines designed to prevent a repetition of such occurrences, and have strengthened reporting systems and procedures.

In June of last year, the hierarchy decided at their summer conference in Maynooth to institute a class-action suit against the *Irish Independent*, a mass-circulation daily. The previous month, it had published an article inferring the church was responsible for the sexual abuse of children and the sexual indiscretions of priests and bishops over a period of thirty years. Lawyers contacted the paper on behalf of four bishops (selected as representatives of the country's four provinces) and have threatened to take further legal action if an apology is not forthcoming. It is ironic, considering that in December 1954, on the fiftieth anniversary of that paper's foundation, Archbishop McQuaid wrote to its editor to acknowledge the paper's "policy of distinctive loyalty toward the church."

Other responses have been more imaginative. One of them is that taken by Bishop Willie Walsh of Killaloe, a small country diocese in County Clare on Ireland's western seaboard. Bishop Walsh, whose low-key but unmistakably liberal pronouncements on a number of issues have been winning him widespread media coverage, decided toward the end of last year that he would have to do something to indicate his acceptance of responsibility for many of the wrongs that had been committed in church institutions.

He has therefore embarked on a pilgrimage, traversing his diocese on foot at a rate of nine or ten miles a day, lodging in local houses and saying Mass in local churches wherever he stopped. At one level, it is certainly a gesture which has caught the public imagination. His sermons, when he preaches, are modest and open. This long public apology is done not with trumpets and fanfare, but with honesty and simplicity.

All of this has helped to underline one of the central dilemmas facing church institutions and officials in the current situation. Many of them wish to apologize but, in the current legal climate, are terrified of doing so for fear that they will find themselves swept away by a deluge of compensation claims.

And there is, deeper still, a slowness to face up to another aspect of the problem. This is the uncomfortable fact that many of the actions which are now coming to light were, quite simply, criminal offenses. Some of the defenses that have been mounted by church officials are based on the undoubted truth that, in many of the institutions concerned, the abuses were ultimately detected by colleagues or superiors and stopped. But the underlying implication is that the church was initially concerned only with the sinfulness of what happened, and blind to its criminality. What was a private, internal scandal has become an open, public one precisely because of the church's failure—so far—to accept fully all its responsibilities in the matter.

For many of the young people in the church's care at the time, it must be said, these church-run institutions provided a haven, however rough-hewn, from abusive parents and an uncaring society. Furthermore, the churches were often the only bodies offering such service in a society that preferred to contract out its social work to voluntary agencies. This implies a degree of culpability on the part of the state, which for decades offloaded the institutional care of many of its most vulnerable young people, without instituting appropriate systems of inspection or control. It may also have to answer.

People who say they have been abused have been calling on the church organizations concerned to release their files for public inspection. Files in the Department of Education, however, are revealing that, in many cases, this department was aware of abuse and did nothing about it. As a result, more than a hundred people have now instituted proceedings not only against the religious orders concerned, but against the state.

In the miasma of hurt and anger which surrounds the continuing stream of legal cases and revelations, it is difficult to discern, as yet, when and where the healing process will start. The only thing we can be sure of at this stage is that the church and state alike will emerge deeply chastened. With luck, they will also be renewed. □

John Horgan *teaches journalism at City University in Dublin.*

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DESPERATELY SEEKING JOAN

Woman behind the hype

Mary Gordon

A favorite of Charles de Gaulle and Charles Péguy, not to mention Bernard Shaw, Joan of Arc has long been a historical figure whose popularity tells us perhaps more about those who revere her than about the martryed saint herself. Joan's curiously malleable legend has been championed by secular French republicans and Catholic monarchists, Dreyfusites and anti-Dreyfusites, Nazi collaborators and resistance figures alike. The popular imagination seems never to tire of her, and the story of the maid of Orléans has been the subject of at least twenty films, most effectively in Carl Dreyer's 1928 silent masterpiece La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, *most recently in last year's thoroughly contemporary* The Messenger *(see Richard Alleva,"Dames at War," December 17, 1999). There is something about the story of the teen-age girl who led an army against English invaders and helped to crown a French king, only to be betrayed and condemned for heresy and witchcraft, that never fails to fascinate. It is a story that clearly has captivated novelist Mary Gordon, and below she writes on how the multifarious nature of Joan's legend and the elusiveness of her personality can expand our ideas about sainthood.*

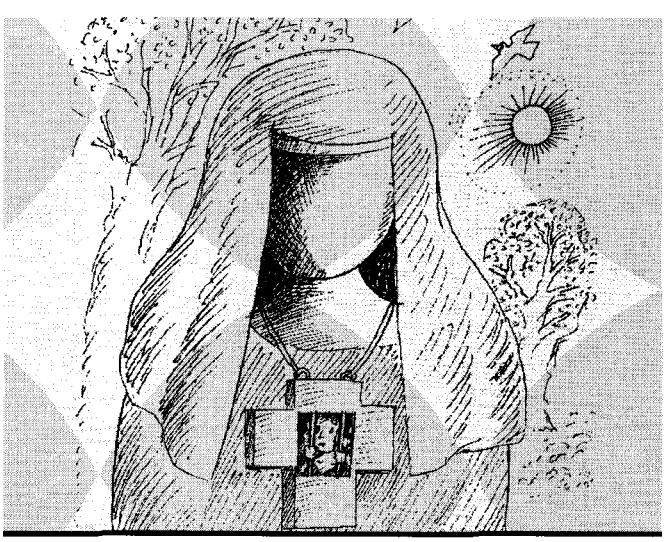
Even centuries as the angel of men's imagination did not make it easy for Joan of Arc (1412–31) to be named a saint by the Roman Catholic church. It was in 1869, nearly three hundred and fifty years after her excommunication and death at the stake, that the process of formal canonization was begun, and she was not declared a saint for another fifty years. In truth, Joan's remarkable personality did not conform to the traditional categories the church used to judge individual sanctity.

At the same time that Joan's cause was being discussed in the Vatican, the question of Christopher Columbus's sanctity was also up for debate. But his case was dropped in 1892 on the ground that he had an illegitimate son. This seemed to be an insurmountable problem, overcoming the glory that he earned because, as the records of the Congregation of Rites (now the Congregation for the Causes of Saints) tell us, "He did not hesitate to conquer the dark sea and to thrust himself into every kind of vicissitude in order to acquire new shores for the gospel and enter into their possession in the name of Jesus Christ." This transformation of Columbus's career as an explorer into one of evangelization indicates the problems for someone like Joan or Columbus, someone whose fame was achieved by exploits not specifically religious in nature. In order to be named a saint, the candidate has to be understood to have been acting for the greater good of the church and in ways that conformed to the gospel. As with Columbus, it required a certain amount of quickstepping to interpret Joan's goal of uniting France under the scepter of Charles VII as a sacred mission.

That this was done for Joan and not for Columbus points to an aspect of the church's canonization process that is always present, if not dominant. At any historical moment, the church canonizes people whom it needs to canonize to make a point about what it considers, at that period, an exemplary life. A saint is made a saint not because canonization does anything for him or her; presumably, he or she has already achieved eternal salvation. A saint is canonized to help the living, and the nature of the help that the living need is often determined by the contemporary pressures of the world upon the church.

Although the first and most natural of questions regarding Joan's canonization is "Why did it take so long?" the more fruitful and interesting ones are "Why did it happen when it did?" or "Why did it happen at all?"

The process that resulted in Joan's canonization began in 1859. The France of that period was at the center of the in-



Mary Gordon, *professor of English at Barnard College, is the author of five novels, three collections of short stories, and a memoir. This essay is excerpted from* Joan of Arc: A Penguin Life. *Copyright © Mary Gordon, 2000. Reprinted by arrangement with Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.*

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tellectual and social phenomenon that the church, beginning with Pope Pius IX and continuing to the present papacy, considered one of the greatest-ever threats to its power. This was a series of impulses over which the church spread the linguistic tarpaulin of the word "modernism," a habit of mind that was secular, rationalist, and anti-hierarchical. Joan's canonization in 1920 can be seen as the church's attempt to recapture the larger public imagination for itself. It was one response to the powerful tide of socialist, anticlerical thought, particularly powerful at the end of the First World War. Many in the church believed that this tide, whose source was clearly in France, could potentially capsize the boat piloted by Peter's heirs to the papacy. What was needed was the ballast of Joan's image: the popular, and unmistakably loyal, daughter of the church.

There is a certain irony that this loyal daughter of the church was sentenced to death by an ecclesiastical court, but this irony was passed over for the greater good of a clearly legible symbolic truth. The greater irony is that this woman, who insisted upon the primacy of her individual experience, who has been called by some, the first Protestant, would be seen as the curb by which the faithful could be brought to obedient, communal heel.

It was an irony not unregarded by the devil's advocates charged with disproving Joan's qualifications for sanctity. This was only one of the problems with Joan as a saint that they addressed, and it is difficult not to sympathize with their reservations. In examining Joan's history of resistance to her clerical judges, they raised the question of whether this constituted a model of faithful obedience, whether, in presenting her for emulation by the faithful, the church was backing the wrong horse, or filly.

It is important to understand what is in the mind of the church when it names someone a saint and in this context to explore the differences between a saint and a hero. The church's criteria for sainthood are based on a person's having lived an exceptional, in fact unimpeachable, life of virtue. The emphasis is placed upon the three theological and four moral virtues; it is assumed that the candidate would have kept the Ten Commandments of Moses and the six commandments of the church—the latter having to do with questions of fidelity to worship. Keeping the commandments is only paying membership dues in the club of potential salvation; it implies only the minimum compliance (however rare that might be in reality), not the distinction that sainthood implies.

The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity; the four moral are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Whereas none of her devil's advocates questioned whether Joan was an admirable person, they asserted again and again that she was imperfect in the practice of the virtues. One of the devil's advocates, Jean Baptist Lugari, said of her: "Even though she was a most noble heroine, even though she was pious and endowed with the most impeccable morals, still her virtues do not seem to be such as to make her worthy of being proposed by a decree of the Holy See an exemplar to be imitated by the Christian faithful."

Of all those who have tried to understand Joan's life and career, it is only the devil's advocates who have focused in a concerted way on Joan's inconsistencies and erratic behavior. None of them suggests that she is not remarkable, but they note her radical shifts. They bring up several events in her life which they determine to be less than saintly. Some of their objections are easy to dismiss. They accuse her of disobedience to her parents in not telling them about her voices; they fault the perfection of her chastity because of her boasting about it and her willingness to undergo physical examinations to verify it. They are worried that so many different men seem to have mentioned, and therefore seen, her breasts. They charge her with intractableness in refusing to answer the judges at her trial, ignoring the fact that this was her judicial right.

More serious for Joan's admirers, they insist, that her throwing herself out of a seven-story tower was an act either of attempted suicide, or presumption, or at best, a lack of submission to her unjust judges, thereby refusing the example of Jesus. They note that she lied by her own admission about the details of an angel bringing the king's crown. They suggest that her voices might have been the result of a hysterical delusion, and remark that even correct prophecy isn't indicative of the holiness of the visions: They cite the case of Savonarola.

They question her faith and her fortitude, saying that these were present only when things were going well for her. They understand that she was badly treated by those who condemned her (some of the consultors use this as an argument against proceeding with Joan's case, since it will only air the church's historical dirty laundry), but they contend that her desire to escape from prison, the complaints with which she received her sentence of death, her tears and dread when she was brought to the stake, although understandable and even poignant in human terms, are evidence that she did not possess saintly fortitude.

They repeatedly assert that because of her stubborn refusal to submit the question of her voices' validity to the church fathers who were judging her, she is not a model for the faithful. They question whether she isn't just a military or a nationalist hero. One consultor wonders that, since France has been such a source of poisonous ideas and so much trouble to the church, maybe her cause wasn't a good one. Wouldn't the church, he suggests, have been better off if France had ceased to exist? They say that she is different from the Old Testament heroines—Judith and Esther—with whom she was compared, because their works were a direct preparation for the coming of Christ whereas hers were only rooted in the fate of one country.

Most important, they say that she is not a martyr. They repeat the evidence that she did not want to die, that she in fact tried to prevent her death, particularly by her abjuration. They compare her to the earlier Christian martyrs, who em-

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braced death and wouldn't have lifted a finger to keep it back. They suggest that, had those saints behaved like Joan, we would have no models of perfect martyrdom.

But Pope Pius X and the College of Cardinals wanted Joan; they dismissed any negative evidence. Perhaps the true miracle of Joan's canonization is that the church, in its desire to create a saint who would bring the wandering sheep back into the fold, who would provide a simple and unassailable enough force to counteract the lure of modern pleasure seeking and free thought, put aside their narrow standards. They forgot their devotion to obedience and conformity and created a saint who is full of the contradictions and imperfections that make, if not a saint, then a great and lovable human being. The devil's advocates, unlike the admiring artists who did their part to insure for Joan a different kind of immortality, understood her changeability and its implications. In this they honored her complexity with a clear gaze, clearer than many of those who loved her for their own reasons.

Their understanding was silenced, and the church, like everyone else who was to use Joan for his or her own needs, presented us with another oversimplification. But a look at her in the clear light of her words and actions creates an image not of singleness, but of fascinating complexity. She was a virgin and she died for what she believed, but she does not fit the type of the virgin martyr. Ardent, impatient, boastful, resistant, implacable, she is like all great saints, a personality of genius.

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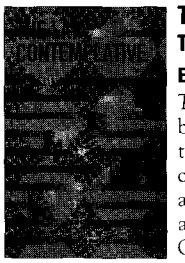

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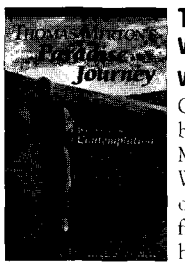

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But what is marked by the word saint, and of what use is such a word to those of us who are skeptical about, or may have ceased to believe in, the certifying power of a group of men, appointed in the name of the Roman Catholic church? What category of human activity does the word "saint" still meaningfully describe?

Perhaps we should look first at what associations come with the word, both to those for whom it is a living term, and those for whom it is a merely recognizable one, denoting something to which they have no access and in which they may have no interest.

"Saint" connects immediately to "goodness." But what does goodness mean to us now? Which are the virtues that we prize? Is it possible for us now to prize any virtue, believing, (all of us necessarily post-Darwinian if not post-Freudian) that we act as we do from self-interest?

Is our willingness to still keep the word "saint" in our lexicon a crack in the matte wall of one of our important understandings of the world? Does the word "saint" create the possibility, glimpsed, and urging a quick discard, of action beyond self-interest? A passionate economy of sheer spending, where what needs to be done, what is compelling and desirable, all come together for more than isolated moments in a human life? A way of life lived in a radical present tense, in which cost is uncalculated and the future someone else's to regard?

Those who have treasured saints have done so because they provide a dream of accompaniment, a hope of advocacy, a special connection based on something particular: shared traits, a profession, a name, a date of birth. In return for devotion, there is the sense of being singled out by the saint, or being part of the saint's small elect. The saint is simultaneously folded into the life of the devoted and worn as a cloak and talisman. She provides inspiration. Above all, she is someone to whom the votary bows.

With all these considerations in mind, what kind of saint could Joan be? Not, perhaps the patroness of France, but rather the patroness of the vivid life, prized not for military victories but for the gift of passionate action taken against ridiculous odds, for the grace of holding nothing back. She was canonized for the wrong reasons, but her words and actions are stronger than the seal set on her by Rome. She leaves behind her a record which if we look at it closely, hops and leaps, moves not in a smooth glissade, but in a series of fits and starts. Perhaps the most fitting tribute we can give her is to acknowledge that any understanding of her will be partial, and that so compelling a figure will constantly demand new visions, new revisions. For she inspires in those whom she compels a response which the word "hero" is too distant properly to serve. She asks to be made our own; she speaks to our need, passionate, beyond or prior perhaps to reason, to feel that we are hers.

But she will not stand still for us. □

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REYNOLD HILLENBRAND

Priestly rabble-rouser, obedient son of the church

John Hill

Old Saint Patrick's on Chicago's West Side has a low-ceilinged, paneled basement. There on a May weekday in 1998 about a hundred people whose lives had been changed by Reynold Hillenbrand, a Chicago priest, paid reverence to his memory (he died in 1978). As the countless number of people whose lives he touched remember, Hillenbrand had patiently disassembled their easy certitudes to reveal for them new understandings which shimmered in their minds the rest of their lives. I drove to this commemoration from my home in Michigan because Hillenbrand had also done this for me. It is past time to recall what he did to make "the lay apostolate" a reality, and how he did it.

Some at the commemoration remembered him as the national chaplain of the Christian Family Movement (CFM), an organization of Catholic married couples who met every other week in small groups to pursue ordered inquiry into the large things in their lives: their marriages, their children, their parishes, their work, their leisure, and their relationship to the political structures that affected their lives. There were also veterans of similar groups for students and for young single people who worked for a living—the Young Christian Students (YCS) and the Young Christian Workers (YCW); together these organizations were called the Catholic action movements. Representatives of organized labor also came to celebrate Hillenbrand's memory; theirs was a cause to which he gave much of his time.

Monsignor Jack Egan, with whom I had once been assigned as curate at Presentation parish on Chicago's West Side and who received an award at the commemoration for his lifetime of social action work, remembered Hillenbrand as one who brought to Catholic lay people and priests new drive and direction. During a break, he and I recalled Hillenbrand's YCW workshops held every summer in stifling classrooms at Saint Joseph's College in rural Rensselaer, Indiana. A married couple whom both Egan and I knew from our days together at Presentation asked me what Hillenbrand was like. It was easy, I told them, to remember things he said and did and to discuss the great influence he had on people. But I faltered when I tried to explain that influence. On my way home to Michigan I wondered about that and decided to visit the archives of the University of Notre Dame, to which Reynold Hillenbrand had willed his papers, to see if they might help me understand how he came to be what he came to be.

In the vaultlike archives on the sixth floor of the library building, the papers of the laconic Hillenbrand are conserved in sixty-three linear feet of file boxes. I rubbed my fingers over an old mimeographed schedule—complete with handwritten marginal notes—for a YCW day of recollection. It was easy then to imagine Hillenbrand on that long-ago day explaining a line of Scripture in his quietly deliberate voice.

Reynold Hillenbrand was born on July 19, 1904 of German-American parents who belonged to Saint Michael's parish on Chicago's Near North Side. He was the second of nine children, six boys and three girls. It was a middle-class neighborhood of refined congestion: old, decently maintained three-

John Hill, *a former priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, lives with his wife near Dowagiac, Michigan. He was the first chairman of the Association of Chicago Priests. During the early 1960s he was assistant national chaplain of the Young Christian Workers.*

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story apartment buildings and houses, all within earshot of the church bells. The family lived in a large rambling house on Hamond Street (now called Orleans). Hillenbrand's father was a dentist with offices on North Avenue not far from the residence of Cardinal George Mundelein. Indeed, Dr. George Hillenbrand was Mundelein's dentist. One brother also became a dentist, another, a psychiatrist, and a third, who was elevated to the rank of monsignor, eventually became the pastor of Saint Mary's in Evanston, Illinois. Perhaps it was from this socially secure family that Reynold received his patrician ease, his apparent freedom from self-doubt, and his refined aesthetic sense. This latter sensibility was not a cultural skin but part and parcel (a favorite phrase of his) of his life. One follower—and we were followers—said of him, "If you want to make a point in a letter to him, make the case well and frame it in correct and graceful sentences."

Hillenbrand saw the world's problems systemically. It wasn't enough to have Christians and others of good will give food to the hungry. If a man had a job with decent pay, he would be able to provide for his own family. Although Hillenbrand respected the work done by social agencies and parishes in alleviating the misery of the disenfranchised, he thought such services would never begin to answer the world's social problems. Whole systems had to be changed.

The Hillenbrands attended Mass, which in those days was celebrated in Latin, at Saint Michael's, a nineteenth-century neo-Gothic church administered by the Redemptorists. The celebrant faced the tabernacle, his back to the uncomprehending congregants who busied themselves with their prayer books or rosaries. They struck their breasts in adoration and contrition when the host was raised after the consecration of the Mass and prayed, "Oh Lord, I am not worthy." Few saw the Mass as a sacrificial meal shared by a community of worshipers. The organist often crackled or whined the Gregorian-chant hymns and the celebrant often hummed, mumbled, or whispered the Latin prayers. Hillenbrand thought Latin kept people from understanding what was going on. He reasoned that some day the Mass would be celebrated in the common tongue, the vernacular of each people, and that it would be celebrated by a priest looking across an altar toward the faithful. The Mass, he said, had to be taken seriously because it was the source and center of the spiritual life.

After Hillenbrand graduated from Chicago's Quigley Preparatory Seminary, he entered Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois to continue his studies for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1929 and remained at the seminary to receive his doctorate in sacred theology in 1931. Then he was assigned to teach at Quigley. But the times were now quite different from those that existed when he entered the major seminary. The Great Depression had bowled over the American economy. Unemployed men, sullen, ragged, and despondent, grouped idly at street corners. Workers had few avenues of redress because the 1935 Wagner Act, which was to strengthen the rights of workers to organize, had not yet passed Congress. But Hillenbrand knew that the Catholic church clearly supported workers' rights. In the 1870s, during the reign of an otherwise conservative Pope Pius IX, the church had given support and therefore legitimacy to the Knights of Labor, which was the forerunner of the American Federation of Labor. In 1919 the American Catholic bishops condemned child labor and supported the right of workers to form unions in order to deal with such matters as wages and job security.

Work, in Hillenbrand's mind, was a means of earning a living. But it was also a way of continuing the act of creation that had been begun by God, a way of serving one's fellow man, and of developing into the kind of person God wanted. When, later in life, he would discuss the place of work in God's redemptive plan, Hillenbrand would compare it to the saving work of Christ on the cross. And he would show how the Mass itself could not exist without the contribution of those who worked in wineries and bakeries to make the elements employed in the sacrament.

Hillenbrand saw the world's problems systemically. It wasn't enough to have Christians and others of good will give food to the hungry. If a man had a job with decent pay, he would be able to provide for his own family. Although Hillenbrand respected the work done by social agencies and parishes in alleviating the misery of the disenfranchised, he thought such services would never begin to answer the world's social problems. Whole systems had to be changed.

Hillenbrand's lifelong agenda became the Mass and the doctrine of work. His next priestly appointment, which was to the archdiocesan mission band in 1933, gave him an opportunity to preach about these things. The mission band was a group of priests who went from parish to parish, spending several days in each to preach, to celebrate Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, to lead the congregation in the rosary, and to bless articles of prayer and devotion. When Hillenbrand's stint on the mission band came to an end in 1936, his voice was worn out from preaching. And I guess that he may have wondered—when he revisited a congregation he had preached to in the past—if the people were any different from when he preached to them the first

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time. His strong and lasting appreciation of small groups may have stemmed from his frustration with larger groups.

His next assignment, in 1936, was as rector of Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein. To the Jesuit faculty at the seminary he added diocesan priests who were familiar with the church's social teachings, because he wanted to be sure that the seminarians' academic training included those teachings. During his time at Mundelein, he toured Europe where he visited with Canon Joseph Cardijn of Belgium, the international chaplain of YCW, which had national chapters throughout Europe, Latin America, French Canada, and West Africa. Patrick Keegan, who was the president of the international YCW, admired Hillenbrand and considered him a close friend. Hillenbrand and another friend of his, Monsignor Donald Kanaly of Oklahoma, would bring the YCW to the United States.

Cardijn lived in Belgium during the period immediately after World War II when the electorate came close to voting for a Communist government. A theorist, Cardijn devised a Christian dialectic to compete in young workers' minds with the theoretical machinery of communism. He coined the phrase "observe, judge, and act" to describe the Christian dialectic. Members of a YCW group would discuss the reality, say, in their place of work. This was the observation part of the inquiry. Then, for the judgment part, they would consider if the Gospels or the church's social teachings had anything to say about the facts they had observed. The action part of the inquiry required them to discuss what might be done to bring the reality they observed more in accordance with the desires of Christ for society. The genius of the "observe, judge, and act" model of the social inquiry was that it permitted people to participate in their own development and—because it was rooted in reality—it was not boring.

Back at the seminary, Hillenbrand distributed translations of literature of the French Canadian YCW movement based in Montreal. His hope was that the Mundelein seminarians, after ordination, would form YCW groups made up of young men and women in their parishes.

Hillenbrand had a winning gift for drawing out the seminarians. I entered the seminary in 1943 and was treated to a weekly poetry class he gave. He brought in stacks of plain and emphatically rhymed popular poems copied from newspaper columns and asked us what we thought of them. He also brought in copies of poems by great poets of earlier ages. Then he would ask us to compare the popular poetry with that of the established poets. He was open to whatever good we might find in either kind of poetry. One of the poems we read was Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur," and I remember the image Hopkins used to describe that grandeur. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." It was an image I would later come to associate with Hillenbrand himself.

In 1944 Cardinal Samuel Stritch removed Reynold Hil-

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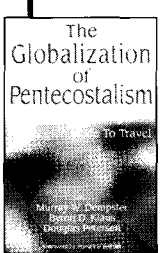

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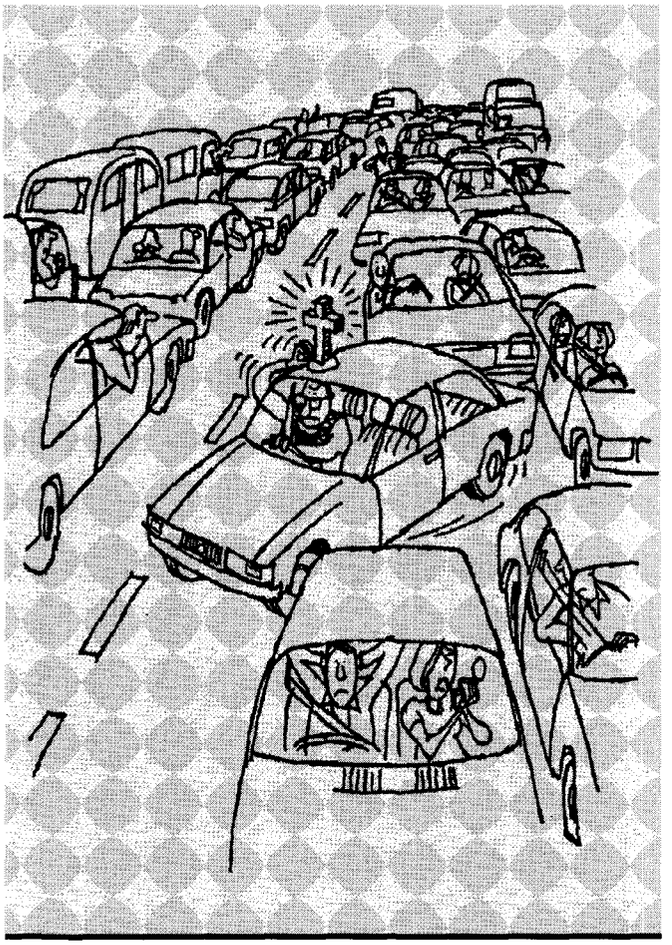

lenbrand from his position as rector of the seminary and assigned him to be pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Hubbard Woods, a suburb of Chicago. Rumor at the time had it that this was arranged by two groups: the Jesuit seminary faculty, which resented Hillenbrand's bringing in diocesan priests to help with the spiritual direction of the seminarians, and a powerful clique of Chicago pastors who disliked the liberal character of the priests who were being ordained under Hillenbrand's leadership. Hillenbrand never complained about his sudden change and he never, as far as it was commonly known, speculated about the forces that arranged his transfer. He simply packed his things and moved to his new assignment. He was an obedient son of the church, and never was this more obvious than at this juncture of his life. It was part of his patrician style to obey those who had proper authority over him.

In retrospect, few things could have advanced his goals in life so well as this transfer. He was now in a position to influence the YCW groups that had been formed by parish priests who had learned about YCW when they were in the seminary under him. YCW rented an ancient three-story apartment building at 1700 West Jackson Boulevard in Chicago. There, under Hillenbrand's inspiration, YCW trained its leaders in intense six-month courses. Hillenbrand brought in labor organizers, liturgists, political leaders, and intellectuals. The vitality of YCW matched that of the college YCS movement and worked hand in glove with its members and with those of the CFM. Hillenbrand had the major formative role in each of these movements.

He arranged for Cardinal Stritch to appoint me as his assistant for national YCW matters. I met with him often in his study in Hubbard Woods to discuss plans for yearly workshops and to help in the preparation of inquiry booklets for the coming year. Bookcases in his study, made from unpainted fir or pine, extended from the floor to the ceiling and covered every square foot of wall space. The fragrant odor of wood mixed agreeably with the subdued, antique smell of the old books. Once, when we were discussing a point in a gospel passage, he said that an interesting reference was made to that point in a book about Shakespeare he received in the mail that very day from Ducketts, a used book store in London. With that he climbed the bookcase ladder, a disabled foot notwithstanding, to retrieve the book and read the passage aloud. I don't remember what the gospel passage was about, but I'll never forget the quiet seduction of his study and his love for books—used books.

YCW held weeklong summer workshops, first at Notre Dame and later at Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana, a quiet setting amid the cornfields of northcentral Indiana. These were the placid pre-Vatican II fifties when there was little impetus for change. Each yearly workshop was dedicated to a single major area of the Christian life. Small-group discussions centered on them and sermons at morning Mass explained them. In the gray fabric of the culture, Hillenbrand's sermons were like colorful threads. The group was held together by its common appreciation of the man.

At the workshops there was a Minneapolis priest named Blaine Barr, who respected Hillenbrand but was not in awe of either him or his point of view. He would frequently ask Hillenbrand why a certain thing had to be a certain way. Weren't there reasonable alternatives? Hillenbrand thought that, no indeed, there were not reasonable alternatives. The rest of us thought that Barr was disruptive, harmlessly and amusingly so, but disruptive nevertheless. It never would have dawned on any of the others to challenge a truth articulated by Hillenbrand.

But there were to be many Barrs in Hillenbrand's future, because the times, as Bob Dylan began to sing at the time, were "a-changin.'" YCW full-timers decided to go to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1963 for the Walgreen Drug Store sit-in. Though Hillenbrand supported the plan, it wasn't his idea. The college-based Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which was to figure so importantly in the coming civil rights movement, had ties to college YCS. The movements that Hillenbrand had created were beginning to go their own way. Blaine Barrs appeared everywhere asking Hillenbrand why things had to be the way they were. Even Patrick Keegan, one of Hillenbrand's closest friends, thought him authoritarian and encouraged me to bring up the issue when I saw him next.

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When I told Hillenbrand that many thought his authoritarian style was disrupting the leadership of YCW as well as that of the other specialized Catholic action movements, he was surprised. "Why do you come up here and sail into me?" he asked. I was pleased with myself that I had stood up to him but he dismissed my criticism out of hand. We awkwardly completed our discussion about other YCW matters and I left.

One of the things that were happening, of course, was that Hillenbrand's work was bearing fruit and that young people didn't need him any more to facilitate their thinking. They could do their own thinking, thank you. He had spent most of his adult life encouraging young people to observe and make judgments about the reality about them and to act bravely on what they saw. They had gotten the hang of the thing and now they were challenging their teacher. He wasn't sure he liked the result. His friend Patrick Keegan, as president of the newly formed International Commission on the Laity, had become the first layman since the Emperor Constantine to address an ecumenical council. Hillenbrand was far less necessary than he had been. Perhaps he felt that.

Toward the end of the 1960s, a group of priests, including myself, who had always considered themselves "Hillenbrand men," visited him at his parish in Hubbard Woods and told him he ought to resign from his position as national chaplain of the specialized Catholic action movements. Like the assassinating cabal that surrounds Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play, each one of Hillenbrand's critics took his rhetorical shot at the master who made him. But unlike Shakespeare's Caesar, Hillenbrand refused to die, quietly returning each shot in the volley at the one who had fired it. To one of them, who was known widely for his wit, he said, "And you, it may disturb you to know, are not funny." Then he poured us all a drink, chatted amiably with us for a short while and, explaining that he had work to do, showed us to the door. We regrouped on the sidewalk in front of his rectory, wondering where we went wrong. I was part of this cabal and yet I later came to think it was Hillenbrand's finest hour. Later still, I came to think it was a sad hour for all of us. Ultimately Hillenbrand, who perceived truth in its grandeur, believed it could be revealed only through a proper chain of command.

In any case, Hillenbrand wasn't quite as self-possessed as he appeared. When death finally came, the thought that he might have wasted many good years of his life by working with small groups instead of large groups troubled him. Jack Egan visited and pointed to the specialized Catholic action movements and the changed lives of the lay people and priests who belonged to them, trying to reassure him. Egan thinks that Hillenbrand understood and accepted the truth of this reassurance.

And so Hillenbrand died. Those who knew him have not been able to forget him. He did indeed brighten life, "like shining from shook foil." □

Barry Hillenbrand

MY UNCLE REYNIE

Propriety & a passion for the poor

Making sense of your relatives is never an easy task. In the case of my uncles it was nearly impossible. But the process was challenging, and often entertaining. Each Thanksgiving during the 1950s and 1960s, for example, my father's five brothers and three sisters, their spouses and gaggle of children would gather for turkey, cranberries, good wine, and bruising intellectual combat. The battles started at the dinner table and continued late into the evening in a vast book-lined living room. It was part sophisticated Trivial Pursuit, part Socratic exercise, part presidential debate. It was very much a Hillenbrand thing. The uncles would subject their nephews and nieces to a steady stream of questions, opinion, and harassment. What did Gregor Mendel's experiments really prove? Was Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* a great war novel or a trashy novel with great war scenes? And, by the way, is there really such thing as a just war?

The political debates often turned bitter and the uncles would go at each other, as well as at the nephews and nieces. Deep divisions within the family were exposed. I could never understand how brothers who shared the same genes, the same upbringing, the same sermons on Sunday could end up spread so widely across the political spectrum. Some un-

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cles were devoted New Deal Democrats and others true-blue John Birch Society Republicans. Over the years I came to admire my uncles. Yes, they were often intellectually arrogant and almost always stubborn (an unfortunate family trait), but the eclectic range of their knowledge was impressive and they taught me a lot about clear and vigorous thinking.

The venue for all this intellectual argy-bargy was the rectory of Sacred Heart Church in Hubbard Woods, where my Uncle Reynold was pastor. Of all the uncles, it was Reynie—as we called him—who was my personal favorite and hero. He championed all the causes that I cared passionately about in those days: civil rights, the labor movement, poverty. Yet he was, by common agreement, the most enigmatic and the least approachable of all the Hillenbrands. There was nothing especially warm and cuddly about any of this older generation of Hillenbrand men, and Reynie, even within the family, was peculiarly cerebral, peculiarly aloof, peculiarly reserved.

One of the puzzles about Reynie was: Where did this decorous scholar, seemingly more comfortable with books than with people, pick up the streak of compassion which led him to become the rebellious champion of the poor and underprivileged?

One possibility—and it is nothing more than a hunch—is that some of it rubbed off from his mother, Eleanor Schmidt Hillenbrand. Eleanor was a strong-willed woman brought up in Dane County, Wisconsin, where her German family settled in the 1840s. What land in the area the Schmidts did not own, the Hillenbrands did. The Schmidts were prosperous and civic-minded. The family helped build the church in the town and, over the generations, produced a number of priests who ran parishes in places like Racine. The family also dabbled in Progressive politics and ideas. There has always been a rebellious and anti-establishment strain in the family tradition that goes back several generations. Reynie was, in a sense, the embodiment of that.

And there was also Eleanor's own personal sense of duty. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Eleanor cared for a succession of hoboes, vagabonds, and bums who called at the back door of the large house the family owned on Hamond Street in Chicago. The back fence off the alley, it was said, carried a secret mark used by those forsaken men to identify a house where food, warm clothes, and even some cash were handed out. Stories of "Eleanor's boys" sleeping in the basement, smoking my grandfather's cigar stubs, and wearing his discarded coats during cold winters were part of family lore.

Eleanor and Reynie were especially close and some of her compassion for the poor may have had influence. But only to a degree. It was hard for those in my generation to imagine Reynie working soup kitchens or living in tenements among the poor. I can't recall ever seeing Reynie without his black coat and Roman collar. It's a reach to think of his sitting around eating pizza with YCS staffers. If he ever did, he'd probably have used a knife and fork. Reynie had a strong sense of propriety.

But this is not to say that Reynie was unfamiliar with suffering. He himself was always frail and in ill health. Like many of his brothers, he was plagued by headaches that seemed to leave his brow permanently furrowed. He had troublesome allergies. My mother, who was very fond of Reynie, would make him cookies out of eggwhites, leaving out the nuts because he was allergic to wheat flour and nuts. And he was hospitalized for nearly a year after a serious auto accident in Oklahoma. For the rest of his life he wore a heavy orthopedic shoe on his right foot. His moods, my mother used to say, permanently darkened after the accident because of the pain he endured. Yet he was no complainer.

My last memories of Reynie were of an Easter meal at my parents' house. He was ill and could not finish eating. He had to lie down on a bed in the guest room. I recall coming in to help him. I sat by his bedside. He said something like, "I feel so weak, so tired." I was taken aback. He was admitting weakness and vulnerability, something I never really expect from an uncle. I wish I had taken his hand and held it. Or that I had given him a hug when he left. But we seldom did those things in the family. Too bad. I never did give my hero a proper farewell.

A few months later he died. His funeral attracted a huge crowd of the great and the good from the church in Chicago. I sat off to the side by myself in the church in Hubbard Woods and listened to the eulogists who proclaimed—should I have been surprised?—that Reynie was their hero as well. I was pleased. And Reynie would have been pleased too, although in his stubborn, reserved manner he might never have admitted it. □

Barry Hillenbrand, *a long-time foreign correspondent for* Time, *now covers international issues for the magazine from Washington, D.C.*

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SCREEN

Richard Alleva

AH, THE THEATER

'Cradle Will Rock' & 'Topsy-Turvy'

The Cradle Will Rock, the title of Marc Blitzstein's 1937 social-protest musical, now also serves as the name of Tim Robbins's film account of how the show, sponsored by the Federal Theater Project (the theatrical branch of the WPA) and mounted by Orson Welles and John Houseman, lost its stage on opening night when punitive budget-cutting by a hostile and Red-hunting Congress closed the doors of the Maxine Elliott Theater and placed sets and costumes in limbo. The cast marched over to the Venice playhouse, where Blitzstein played his score on an upright while cast members (forbidden to perform on any stage because of union problems) stood up in the auditorium to sing and act. The event was a history-making rouser but proved to be virtually a one-night stand, since the Welles-Houseman unit within the FTP folded within weeks, to be followed shortly by the demise of the FTP itself.

Robbins fictionalizes what was an already incredible event in order to create a portrait of Depression America that mirrors, expands upon, and enfolds the substance of the Blitzstein opus. We are presented with a panorama reminiscent of the novel *Ragtime*: the machinations of capitalists dealing with Mussolini; the scratchy relationship between patron and artist exemplified by Nelson Rockefeller's hiring of Diego Rivera to paint a public mural; the McCarthy era adumbrated by the Dies committee grilling FTP head Hallie Flanagan about Communist infiltration. Even the future ascendancy of abstract art is forecast when Rockefeller longs for paintings of pure color and form, free of potentially subversive subject matter.

The sweep of the movie, with its virtuosic long-takes and labyrinthine camera pans, echoes the force of the original *Cradle*, but Robbins also seems to subscribe to Marc Blitzstein's bullying Marxist shallowness. Of course we expect the

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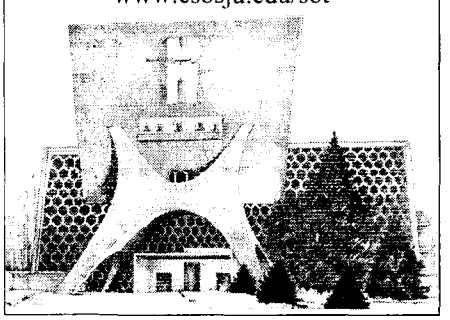

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Matins

Firefly spirit & undying breath
who live where the intellect is darkest
where every cry descends into peace
with ended days, grasses and pallid faces

do not leave me now that I understand
how few more years I will walk in the light.
Shade covers a good part of me; it routs
things into dust, if I stretch my hands out.

Today you are only that breath of my dust.
As to still fronds in the hot, sultry nights
from the air an unexpected murmur sighs

words yet from the springwell of my dreams
I know you bring me before dawn. But day
can't find them, and I don't recognize you.

Ned Condini

capitalists to be the heavies in this lefty movie, but why does Robbins conjure up a costume ball at which the plutocrats dress as eighteenth-century French aristocrats? If a guillotine fell on somebody's neck, it certainly wasn't that of American capitalism, so shortly to be revived by World War II.

This movie is stuffed with unexamined information that will puzzle any audience member who isn't a theater student or practitioner. One example: Who is the funny-looking dude with the Caesar haircut and German accent who serves as Blitzstein's artistic-political conscience? Answer: Bertolt Brecht. But even if his name is on the soundtrack (I didn't hear it), will the uninitiated understand how the German's theories of stagecraft influenced American theories?

Worse, Robbins is so anxious to establish parallels between the misadventures of the FTP and the recent woes of the NEA that he presents Hallie Flanagan as a saint (to be sure, Cherry Jones gives great pleasure in the role) because she encourages a socially engaged, basically utilitarian art that is sniffed at by the Dies committee. Yet, while Dies projects a certain sinister force, Flanagan's real foils here are Welles and Houseman, debasingly caricatured by Angus Macfadyen and Cary Elwes as a pair of prancing queens (though Welles was straight and Houseman always dignified), wagging their fingers at each other and screaming "You shut up!" In Robbins's view, apparently, these two are the avatars of Art for Art's Sake, and that is why the filmmaker sends them up and puts them down. This is not only nonsense in itself (Welles's brand of liberalism marked almost all his work) but also vitiates the second half of the film.

For surely one of the key themes of *Cradle* (the movie, not the musical) is the conflict between the sort of administrator (Flanagan) who, however generously, looks on art as one contribution among many to the ongoing health of the country, versus the totally consumed artist (Welles) who views his art as Dionysian vision that can never be bracketed as an "educational resource." Both positions have their measure of truth, and the conflict between them might have produced true drama. But with a Flanagan embodying pure goodness opposing a Welles/Houseman duo oozing effete aestheticism, the battle has to be one-sided.

It's odd that a movie as panoramic as this one should also be so intellectually narrow-minded. *Cradle Will Rock* is committed art, all right, but it's committed only to the naive historical revisionism of Hollywood liberals.

Topsy-Turvy, another film about a theatrical opening—*The Mikado* in London in 1885—proves to be one of the best films of 1999. Its maker, Mike Leigh, is probably further to the political Left than Tim Robbins, but he's too intent on creating multilayered life on screen to find time to wag a pedantic finger at us. His trust that we will be intelligent enough to reach our own conclusions about the Victorian society that embraced the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas is the sign of a mature artist.

At *The Mikado*'s rehearsals, the male actors have on formal jackets and ties and top hats, while the women wear dresses that would not look out of place at a lunch in a good restaurant. The "call boy," who warns the performers about the proximity of their entrances, begs permission of the stage manager before he raps on dressing-room doors and then waits respectfully while performers run through the opening bars of numbers before he gives the time check. When Gilbert stops by on opening night to wish the two lead actresses luck, he is cordial to both but kisses only one; the slighted woman stiffens but then seems to accept the slight snub as her due. Though Gilbert has entrusted her with the lead role of Yum Yum, he cannot bring himself to give her his complete benison because she is an alcoholic and an unwed mother, and she understands this.

What kind of society is it that supports a theatrical community operating within these norms of propriety? Surely it is as stable, as hieratic, as self-approving, and as rule-bound (at worst hidebound) as the mythic Japan that's portrayed in the operetta. But this is precisely the sort of straitened society that produces men such as W. S. Gilbert

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and Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Oscar Wilde, and Jerome K. Jerome. The satirical absurdities in their work (Gilbert's "topsy-turveydom") draw their sustenance from the pompous equanimity of the social world they live in.

This movie may seem a little too amorphous in its first half. What do all these facts add up to, we may well ask ourselves, as we learn that the 1880s saw the flourishing inventions of the fountain pen (the "reservoir pen"), the doorbell and the telephone; the slaughter of General Gordon and his troops by the Mahdi at Khartoum; that Gilbert had abominable relations with his dotty parents; that Sullivan was a sexual gourmand? Are we merely being given a guided tour of the Life and Times of G&S? Is *Topsy-Turvy* the cinematic equivalent of a coffee-table picture book?

Though I don't think all its details line up neatly in support of one theme, *Topsy-Turvy* comes into focus in the second half when *The Mikado* rehearsals get underway. In the midst of Victorian splendor and squalor, a small band of men and women are achieving radiance and order through devotion to work. Cocaine, alcohol, promiscuity, vanity, fear of physical and professional decline, gluttony, even varicose veins, all take their toll, but when a piece of comic business falls into place, when the high note can be maintained, when a dance finally achieves the correct style, then, however briefly, a god descends.

And two men who can barely stand each other save each other. Gilbert—despised by his parents, unable to make love to his wife, feeling such a fury at the opening-night audience (and perhaps at all humankind) that he takes a nightmarish walk through the worst slums rather than pace backstage—burrows into his writing as a soldier under bombardment huddles in his foxhole. Gilbert, like a surprising number of eminent Victorians, felt life to be a nightmare with meaninglessness lurking at its center, and his poetry, wittily dense to the point of impaction, both dazzles and cries out for oxygen.

That oxygen comes from Sullivan's music. The composer aspired to Beethovian grandeur and despised himself for writing what he considered fluff. But it was precisely Gilbert's gift for absurdity that tapped the vein of greatness in Sullivan's limited talent: his penchant not for the grand musical statement but for lyrical grace and humor. Allan Corduner's Sullivan, an amalgam of shy sensuality with Victorian dignity, and Jim Broadbent's Gilbert, a bull both undermined and inspired by melancholy, perfectly complement one another.

Unlike Tim Robbins, who serves up so little of *The Cradle Will Rock* that we can hardly grasp what was so revolutionary about it, Mike Leigh gives us more than half-a-dozen full numbers from *The Mikado*, and his performers convey what it was like to deliver these enchanting songs for the first time, without the crust of a hundred years of tradition, a word that too often stands for rote taking the place of thought.

Topsy-Turvy doesn't propound any new ideas about the life of the theater, perhaps because all the old ideas are pretty much true: The real children of playwrights and composers are their plays; devotion to craft leaves one insufficient for everyday existence, especially domesticity. But *Topsy-Turvy*'s real achievement is in demonstrating what can never be demonstrated too often: The texture of a work of art validates its ideas, not vice versa. What you take away from this movie is not a bunch of half-baked notions about the social role of the theater, but the sensation of having been in the theater itself and subject to its unreliable but addictive glamour. □

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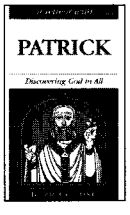

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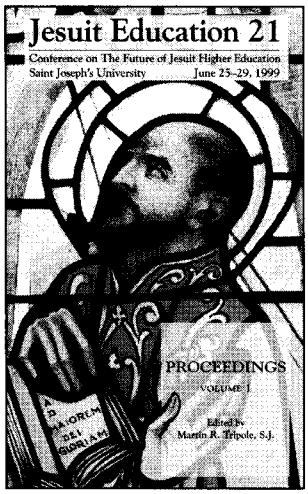

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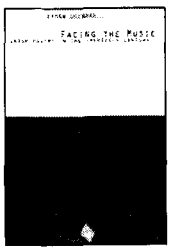

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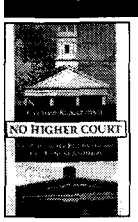

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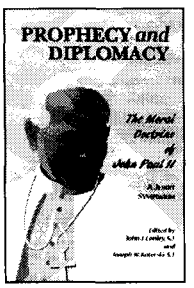

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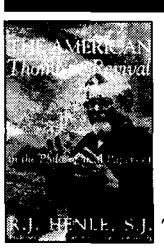

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Robert Murray Davis

LOOSENING UP

At play with contemporary art

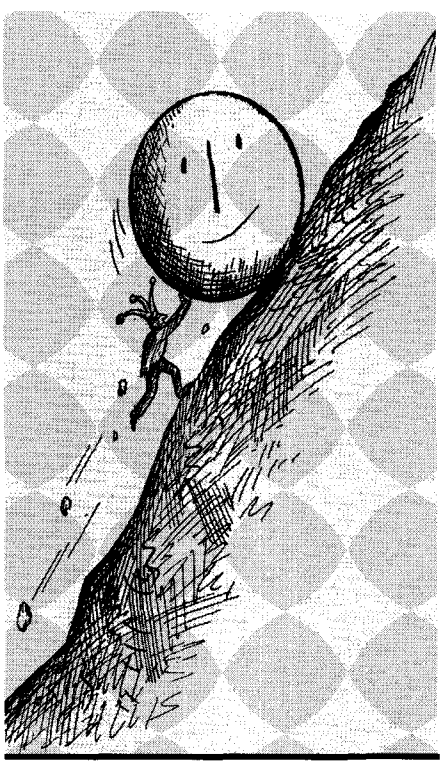
There doesn't seem to be a lot of graffiti in Lisbon, or I didn't notice it because my Portuguese is minimal. But one graffito in English showed up at various locations. It read, "He who is without faith is the looser."

I'm used to the impressionistic use of English—try a provincial Hungarian menu—but this could as easily have been a philosophical proposition. I've lived for more than thirty years in the American Bible Belt, where the congressional delegation is ultraconservative in religion and politics, even by the standards of the Republican party and the Baptist church. The same attitudes are tiresomely evident in the editorial and letters columns of Oklahoma's largest newspaper. So it seems self-evident that faith, at least of a certain kind, constricts and narrows. That's as true of my doctrinaire leftist acquaintances as it is of my so-called representatives in Washington.

The great thing about travel is that many of the usual boundaries and limits either disappear or don't seem to apply. And, as I discovered when I took the train west from Lisbon to Sintra, that's as true of aesthetics as it is of morals and politics. In Lisbon's museums, I had examined thousands of square yards of framed, cased, and sculpted objects ranging from the prehistoric to the postmodern. Some were by artists whose work I'd seen and been impressed by elsewhere, some were derivative in depressingly obvious ways. Some, especially that of Portuguese artists new to me, had a fresh perspective on old themes. In a Pentecost scene an apostle at the rear of the group was raising his arm to fend off the tongue of flame, like a man attacked by a bee. In *Birth of John the Baptist,* maids were performing the necessary but usually undepicted task of cleaning the floor after the delivery. A portrait of the apostles pictured a very funky-looking and sometimes overweight downscale group of real human beings without haloes or Tuscan gloss.

But even this kind of faith-based realism, though welcome, could not be described as "loose." Nor were the classically modernist works on the first floor of the Sintra museum. But upstairs there was something different. On the landing of the museum's last flight of stairs to the second floor lay stones, strewn loosely in a rough rectangle about ten feet long and four or five wide. Just lying there. No frame or rope or anything else to separate the rubble from the rabble.

My first and very strong impulse was to kick one of the stones—in fact, to mess with, maybe mess up, this unprotected and at least potentially random



scattering that dared to call itself art. But I didn't kick anything, and after reading the legend identifying the rocks as Richard Long's *Sandstone Line,* I moved on like a good patron through the rooms containing the other exhibits. All were more colorful than what I still had trouble calling Long's "piece." Many were more obviously "transgressive," to use last year's popular term. All had a necessary relationship between part and whole and a definite shape imposed by framing or welding or clamps. And all *looked* like something.

But none stuck in my mind like Long's scattered stones. Can a work of art exist in a form that is neither accidental nor fixed—in other words, can art be loose? If I had dislodged one of the rocks, would I have been a vandal? Was it even possible to vandalize a work that was, in legal terms, an attractive nuisance? Did the piece invite, indeed demand, such a response?

By the time I had finished walking through the second-floor galleries, a group of teen-age schoolchildren had gathered around Long's stones. They stood looking at each other until one boy stuck out his arms for balance and hopscotched in gaps between the stones from one side to another like a broken-field runner. That emboldened the rest. A girl used it as an obstacle course; then a slender black kid in glasses walked from end to end on the stones themselves. Then one boy reached down, picked up a small wedge-shaped stone, and made as if to put it in his pocket. A second boy grinned, gestured as if to say "Piker," picked up a stone larger than a bread-loaf, and pretended to conceal it in the fold of his T-shirt.

In any other museum I know of, there would have been guards, alarms, Dobermans, admonitions, expulsions. But either the Portuguese are very tolerant or they didn't care. And I noticed that the kids didn't molest or play with any of the other pieces. Their horseplay reminded me of an incident from the late 1960s that I hadn't thought of in years. The Catholic grade school in Norman, Oklahoma, had closed for lack of teachers, and some of the parishioners had volunteered to help convert it into a day-

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care center for low-income families. We cleaned and sawed and collected equipment from garages and attics. Then the Christian education director, an earnest young man named Gabe Huck (even Flannery O'Connor would have been embarrassed to make up a name like that) found some very rough-cast concrete circles lying in a field at the former Navy air base north of town, got help loading them into a pickup, and installed them on the playground for the children to use as stepping stones.

When I unrolled the newspaper the next morning, I read "Major Art Theft in Norman." A restaurant in Oklahoma City had commissioned work from an environmental artist; after the concrete cured, the circles were to be displayed on edge in some kind of pattern. The police chief speculated that the thieves had to be from New York or someplace like that because locals couldn't be sophisticated enough to realize the value of the art.

Paper still in hand, I dialed Gabe. "Uh, Gabe. You might be interested in this story..."

After various gulps and "Oh, my Gods!" he called the police and fessed up. Fortunately, the artist had a sense of humor, donated his work to the day-care center, and was photographed watching the children hop across his stones.

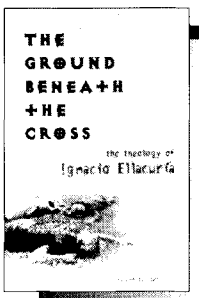
The Portuguese teen-agers had the same impulse. They didn't want to mess up or mess with the stones; they just wanted to mess around with them.

A few days later, at the Guggenheim in Bilbao, I came across another Long installation. The legend explaining this one noted that Long photographs "his interventions as a means of preserving what nature will eventually undo." This information solved two problems: what term to use for what Long does and what to think about the teen-agers. They were forces of nature.

I was given another perspective on this experience at an exhibit of resolutely modern art in Budapest. In a darkened space curtained off from the main hall was a CD-projection of Ange Leccia's *The Sea*, shifting, fluid shades of black and gray undulated across the wall at the far end. Every adult who passed in front of the light used in projecting Leccia's images flinched at seeing his or her shadow and ducked out of the way. But a boy, about eight, started in delight, waved his hand in front of the projector, and ran toward the shadow of his head, becoming, at least temporarily, in and of the work.

Of course, this kind of interaction wouldn't work in most museums. All you can do with a Rembrandt or Vermeer, for example, is look at it. And that is, as the line in the old Latin Mass went, "fitting indeed and just." To be sure, the works of Long and Leccia are designed primarily to be contemplated. But unlike the Rembrandt or even the wrappings of Christo, they are *looser*. They admit, even anticipate, the possibility that boundaries don't have to be constricting or confining. And that possibility allows for a different kind of pleasure, even joy. □

Robert Murray Davis *teaches at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.*



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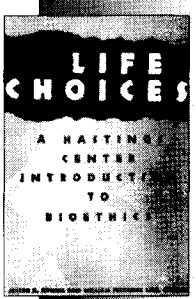

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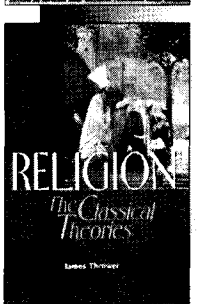

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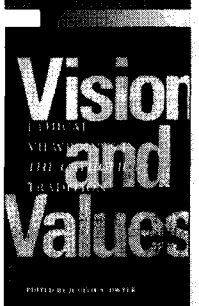

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Rediscovering Roncalli

Journal of a Soul
The Autobiography of Pope John XXIII
Image/Doubleday, $14.95, 453 pp.

Christopher Ruddy

Pope John XXIII is both an icon and a Rorschach test. For virtually all who remember him, he is revered as a good and holy man who was as warm as Pius XII was aloof, a man who visited the Roman prisons, received the archbishop of Canterbury, and welcomed Jewish visitors to the Vatican with the greeting, "I am your brother." For many, he remains the embodiment of all that is good in Catholicism, a reminder of that "one, brief, shining moment" when undreamed-of renewal was possible and a "new Pentecost" seemed on the horizon.

But for those under forty-five, John is at best a faint memory obscured by the conflicted Paul VI and overwhelmed by the titanic John Paul II. I was born seven years after John's death and turned eight in the "year of three popes," just a few months shy of my First Communion. I have no firsthand recollection of John or Vatican II. My Catholic existence has been formed in large part by John Paul II—I remember Yankee Stadium in 1979, not Saint Peter's in 1962. Who John was and what the big deal about him is remain questions for many Catholics my age.

So the reissue of Pope John's spiritual diary, *Journal of a Soul*, comes at an opportune time. His beatification is scheduled for later this Jubilee year, John Paul II is in the twilight of his pontificate, and the inevitable reflection and politicking about what qualities the next pope should possess are widespread. More pointedly, after nearly four decades during which John has remained the touchstone for liberal Catholics, how does he compare with John Paul II, the pope with whom he is most often contrasted and even set against, and the only pope of whom Catholics under thirty-five have any substantial memory?

Part of the answer is found in *Journal of a Soul*. Published originally in 1965, and written intermittently over John's active and long life, *Journal* alternates between broad swatches of formulaic, if earnest, piety and moments of moving personal and spiritual clarity. The early entries reveal Angelo Roncalli, a young Italian seminarian of great devotion and scrupulosity, who strives to imitate the purity and precocious sanctity of saints like Aloysius Gonzaga. His spiritual guides emerge: Mary, Thomas à Kempis, Ignatius Loyola, and, above all, Francis de Sales, whose gentleness and charity were John's lifelong model. Many passages are embroidered with the spiritual vocabulary of the time ("the honey and heavenly nectar of your consolations"), but there is flesh and blood under the filigree. As a sixteen-year-old, in 1898, he writes of his abjectly poor peasant family: "This is what is hardest for me to bear, to think that in the case of my dear ones, suffering seems to serve no good purpose, but rather to do them harm." No resigned mysticism of suffering here, but rather intimations of his landmark social encyclicals *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris* and their clarion support of basic human rights.

Roncalli's later years as papal nuncio in Paris and cardinal patriarch of Venice (1945–58) reveal a man of deep humanity and worldly understanding, yet he repeatedly questions his own belief that a "caress is better than a scratch." Does he too often avoid necessary conflict? he asks himself. Is not the sword sometimes necessary? Is he afraid of the inevitable upheavals reform will bring? In the context of these misgivings, it is still astonishing to contemplate how this moderate, deeply traditional man single-handedly brought about Vatican II, the most significant and revolutionary Christian event since the Reformation. How? Why?

I believe the answer can be found in Bulgaria, of all places. Plucked out of

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the Roman curia in 1925, the newly ordained Bishop Roncalli was assigned there as apostolic visitor (later delegate). Incessant conflict between Orthodox and Catholics, and Latin and Eastern Catholics, and uncertainty about his own mission caused him immense suffering. The vulnerability of the diary entries from these years makes clear that John's gentleness was not spinelessness or a purely natural disposition, but the fruit of suffering endured "without letting anyone even know it [was] there." He knew that the way of Christ was not an easy one. It demanded the strength and humility to be conformed to Christ and his cross. John's smile was that of a man who knew how much God loves his people.

And this love, born of suffering, created in Roncalli an extraordinary evangelical simplicity, which allowed him to distill Christianity to its essentials and eventually renew the church. That purity of intent will also remind the reader of John Paul II (at least I find it hard to think of one without the other). Both men knew suffering intimately, John through childhood poverty and in his diplomatic service, John Paul II through the early loss of his parents, the experience of nazism and communism, attempted assassination, and illness. Both are transparently evangelical—John in his gentleness, and John Paul II in his fearlessness. Moreover, even their papal activities are yoked. John Paul II has done more than any other pope in modern history to be truly the bishop of Rome, a pastoral activity initiated in fact by John. John convoked a Roman synod and then Vatican II, the latter at which John Paul II was an active participant, and to which he has been firmly committed. Both have been untiring advocates of the inviolable dignity and rights of the human person. Both have been deeply committed to Christian unity, and John Paul II has extended this to interaction with non-Christian religions. Their papacies, I submit, are not as far apart as some think—or wish.

And, yet, the two men remain quite different in their simplicity. Could John Paul have given the council the space it needed to be truly collegial and open

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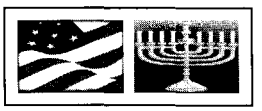

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to unexpected developments? The conduct of the recent synods of bishops suggests otherwise. Or, in the face of relentless challenges to human dignity and life, could John have sustained the prophetic, unyielding defense of the human person that has been a hallmark of John Paul's pontificate? Simply put, one can scarcely imagine John confronting Sandinista hecklers, or John Paul II delivering John's opening message to the council.

Journal illustrates how, despite the overwhelming influence of John Paul II in the formation of its generation, the substance of its Catholicism owes just as much to John XXIII. John Paul II's evangelical fearlessness has been a gift to the church, one to which youth especially have responded. Time will reveal the fruit it bears. John's evangelical gentleness has already born abundant fruit in Vatican II and in John Paul II. John, and *Journal of a Soul*, remind us—particularly those younger—that boldness need not exclude gentleness, nor gentleness boldness. The Holy Spirit gives both. □

Christopher Ruddy *is a doctoral candidate in theology at the University of Notre Dame and an intern at* Commonweal.

MADE IN CHINA

Tears of Blood
A Cry for Tibet
Mary Craig
Counterpoint, $26, 341 pp.

Emmy Chang

There has been no shortage, in our century, of genocidal regimes that slaughter people by the millions. But Communist China must be unique in at least this regard: In Tibet, after they've killed you, they charge your family for the price of the bullet.

Just about every imaginable barbarism of war or peace has been perpetrated in the fifty years of the Chinese occupation. *Tears of Blood* is an account of what has happened and is happening in Tibet, but its landscape could have come straight out of Dante or Hieronymus Bosch.

Communist officials gouge out a man's eyes and throw him from the roof of Tibet's holiest shrine. A father and daughter are forced to have sex. Methods of execution include "crucifixion, dismemberment, vivisection, beheading, burying, burning and scalding alive, dragging the victim to death behind galloping horses. Children were forced to shoot their parents, disciples their religious teachers...." The Chinese even have a system for those who might try to speak a last word of defiance: Condemned prisoners often have their vocal cords severed before execution, to prevent them from crying out.

And after nearly fifty years of Communist occupation, the Tibetans' condition has scarcely improved. One of the subtler shocks of Mary Craig's book is that the atrocities she details continue in an unbroken line from 1950 through to 1999. Certainly the People's Republic (PRC) has no intention of leaving. "I hope it is clear to you," an official told a crowd of Tibetans after a failed uprising in Lhasa, "that you stand as much chance of getting your independence as you do of seeing the sun rise from the west."

Craig quotes freely and extensively from scores of interviews she conducted with refugees, including the Dalai Lama. Their firsthand accounts allow for a depth of detail no mere historian could match—as, for instance, when one ex-prisoner describes a wall to which Tibetans were chained for days at a stretch. Some chains, he explains, were attached lower on the wall than others; these were for children.

Tibet had existed for nearly two thousand years as a sovereign state, only twice subject to rule by outsiders. Since the occupation, however, the Chinese government has taken pains to rewrite the past, insisting that Tibet has always been a part of China. Even the language has been deliberately altered: "Tibetan history [has] been reduced to a matter of fairy tales and legends, the very word

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for history (*gyalrab*) being reserved for Chinese history only." (Other deleted words include *Bopa*, meaning "Tibetan," and *Bo*, meaning "Tibet.") Many Tibetans were forced to adopt Chinese names, one syllable of which would be taken from Chairman Mao's. Even to speak against the PRC in Tibet today is a capital offense. Indeed, Craig notes dryly, China "[denies] torture, [denies] in fact that there are any political prisoners, since political offenses are *ipso facto* criminal." Nor is it very difficult to "endanger national security," as the Chinese call it: You need do nothing more extreme than sing, or even listen to, a Tibetan song—or be caught with a picture of the Dalai Lama.

In order to destroy Tibet, it was crucial for the Chinese to supplant religion, the mainstay of Tibetan culture and life. By 1979, 60 percent of Tibet's libraries had been burnt; at Drepung, formerly the biggest monastery in the world, a population of ten thousand monks was reduced to eleven. "A monk who begged the Chinese not to use the Buddhist Scriptures as toilet paper had his arm cut off," Craig notes, "and was told to ask God to give him another one." Monks and nuns were forced to marry; Craig mentions a Tibetan peasant to whom the government promised one hundred dollars for every monk she would seduce. As recently as January of last year, the Chinese Communist party has campaigned to encourage atheism specifically for the purpose of quelling support for the Dalai Lama. Not that PRC forces have been averse to going to the other extreme. When circumstances required, Tibetans could just as easily be forced to worship, as they were in the Prayer Festival of 1988, enacted to convince foreign journalists that religious freedom thrived in Tibet. Indeed, the Chinese take great pains over their public image. They made a great show, for instance, of lifting martial law in 1990, when in fact many believe the only real change was that soldiers exchanged their uniforms for plain clothes. Tibetan policies—and Tibetan life—remained the same.

The refugees Craig interviewed seem to have no illusions as to the only hope for their nation. "We must tell...the outside world about Tibet," says one young monk. "Maybe it will change something. Maybe it won't. But there is no other way."

Ever since Deng Xiaoping said he didn't care whether a cat was black or white so long as it could catch mice, the Chinese Communists have explicitly divorced issues of trade from issues of human rights; unfortunately, the West eagerly followed suit. The Tibetan genocide has provided as blatant a demonstration as one could ask for: At least 1.2 million Tibetans, one-fifth of the population, have been killed or have died of starvation under the wanton sadism of the Communist regime. Yet neither those killed at Tiananmen nor those killed in Tibet have ended our politicians' insistence that trade and human-rights concerns need have nothing to do with one another. What we hear instead is that economic openness will eventually lead to democracy; that we need only sit back and wait for a massage from the invisible hand. Meanwhile, the Chinese can continue their reign of terror, with not only our indifference but our help. As Chinese dissident Harry Wu has been demonstrating for years, PRC gulag-manufactured products make their way to Western markets regularly. Every concession of ours has been a victory for the Communist regime, and they know it. When most-favored-nation status was renewed in 1994, Chinese police taunted the Tibetans: "If America dares not oppose us, how can you?"

In 1965, when the genocide was still young, the United Nations passed a resolution expressing "grave concern" and "deep anxiety." And in 1987, the House of Representatives unanimously condemned the annexation of Tibet. What the West is continually forgetting is that in foreign policy, indignation has a short half-life. If *Tears of Blood* does nothing else, it must stand as a brutal reminder that unless backed by deeds, "concern," "anxiety," and "condemnation" will not save Tibet in 2000, any more than they saved it in 1965 or 1987. □

Emmy Chang *is a free-lance writer who lives in New Haven, Connecticut.*

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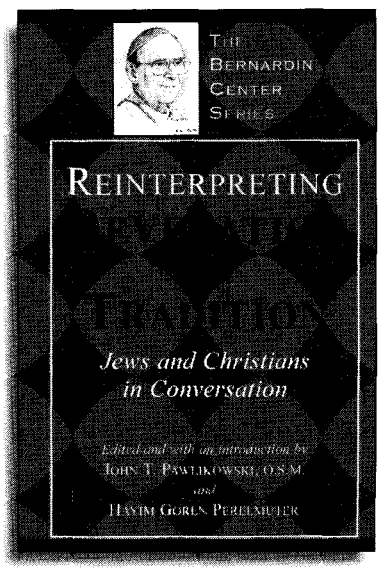

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IN DEFENSE OF JUSTICE

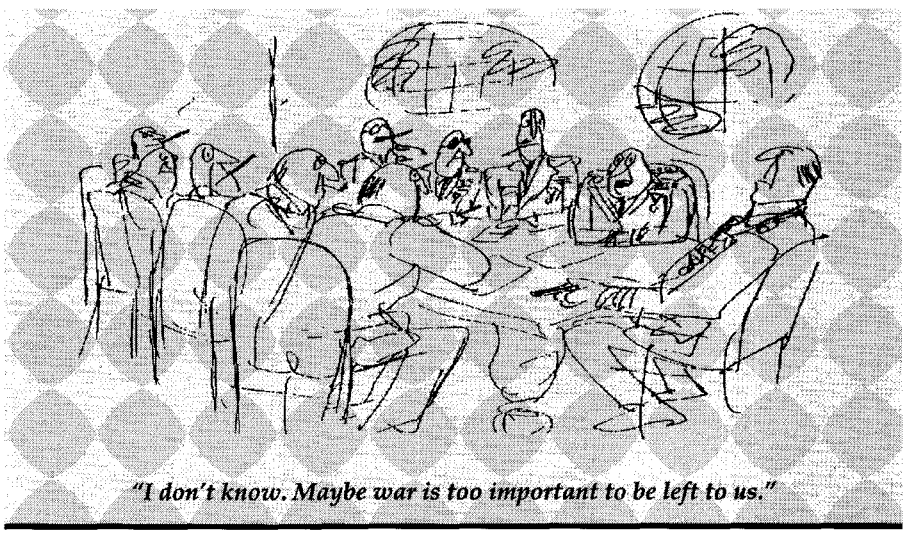
Morality and Contemporary Warfare
James Turner Johnson
Yale University, $25, 256 pp.

J. Bryan Hehir

James Turner Johnson of Rutgers University is a standard reference for scholars who address the moral and legal problems of modern war. A student of the late Paul Ramsey, Johnson has both extended Ramsey's legacy and revised it in his efforts to shape an adequate ethic for the late twentieth century. In *Morality and Contemporary Warfare,* Johnson offers a synthetic summary of the just-war ethic and engages new issues of politics and strategy. This book, like several before it, will enrich the normative analysis of politics and war. I recommend it highly, even though I differ with Johnson on some issues of theory and judgment.

Johnson's objective is best summarized by the title of his concluding chapter, "Reshaping and Affirming a Consensus on the Purposes and Limits of War." A principal theme of the book is that building a consensus is necessary because contemporary warfare presents problems quite different from the kinds of conflict that moralists have addressed for much of the past fifty years. While he is surely correct to stress the shift from interstate to intrastate warfare which occurred in the 1990s, I find quite overdrawn his judgment that "Moral analysis has been slow to react to this changed empirical face of war and when it has reacted, it has done so on the basis of dominant assumptions of the moral debates of the 1980s."

Unless one uses a very restricted definition of who can contribute to moral analysis of war, a quick literature search of the 1990s produces a range of authors engaging the moral, political, and strategic significance of the very conflicts Johnson wants to analyze. At the center of these "new wars" lie the issues of internal conflict and international intervention. These issues have been addressed by Bernard Williams, Michael Walzer, Pierre Hassner, Stanley Hoffmann, Ernest Haas, Bruce Russett, Adam Roberts, Joseph Nye, John Langan, Drew Christiansen, Kenneth Himes, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and George Weigel, among others. Their conclusions are not identical, but these authors have neither ignored the newness that evolved in the 1990s nor addressed it from outdated political or moral assumptions.



"I don't know. Maybe war is too important to be left to us."

While dissenting from Johnson's description of the *status questionis,* I find his own contribution to the ongoing wider discussion carefully drawn and constructive. His first two chapters summarize and analyze the legacy of just-war thought and bring it into dialogue with both the realist and liberal traditions of international relations, illustrating how the just-war ethic relates to and differs from each tradition. His statement of the normative tradition is characteristically well documented and lucid, and provides the reader with a solid sense of the continuing vitality of the just-war ethic.

In light of this normative framework, Johnson proceeds to analyze two issues: the problem of intervention, and policies which target civilians. Johnson develops his own position on intervention in dialogue with four other sources: Ramsey, Walzer, the U.S. Catholic bishops' statement of 1993 (*The Harvest of Justice*), and the resources of international law. In the end he comes to a carefully drawn position for humanitarian intervention, one which goes beyond inherited norms of international law but recognizes that advances in this area must be incremental. Johnson does not ignore the cautions of realism in advocating an interventionist policy, but he nicely captures the fundamental moral issue of the 1990s after discussing Rwanda and Bosnia: "Intervening to help the victims of such conduct in war, then, is not simply a humanitarian action oriented to the good of those victims; it also serves the cause of international peace and stability. In such cases, not acting is the worse evil."

Johnson's analysis of Bosnia and Rwanda in the chapter on "War against Noncombatants" stands in direct relationship to Ramsey, who did more than any other scholar to establish "the principle of discrimination" or noncombatant immunity at the very heart of modern just-war doctrine. Johnson invokes his four sources to refute the assertion that the character of modern war has rendered the principle of discrimination obsolete. A lapidary sentence summarizes his case: "In moral terms, the ar-

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gument that allows warfare to be intentionally directed against noncombatants in such conflicts as those in Bosnia and in Rwanda-Zaire is simply wrong: what combatants *do* may make them liable to have armed force used against them, not what they believe or who they are ethnically or religiously; likewise, what noncombatants do *not* do—participate in the making of war—means that they should not have war made against them, whatever their beliefs, ethnicity, religion, or sympathies." That states a basic truth with the clarity and power it deserves.

Johnson's final two chapters arise directly from the conflicts of the 1990s and highlight key aspects of his scholarship. The chapter "Conflicts Inflamed by Cultural Differences" draws heavily on his recent work on the relationship of Islamic and Christian moral doctrines on war. His chapter on "War Crimes and Reconciliation after Conflict" is the best of the book. His mastery of both moral and legal literature equips him to provide a solid historical background for efforts to establish war-crimes tribunals today.

While strongly endorsing many of Johnson's policy conclusions, I differ with him on a theoretical point. Here and in other writings he has opposed the position both of Protestant ethicists (Jim Childress and Ralph Potter) and of Catholic bishops in their formulation of the just-war ethic. All have used an approach that begins with a presumption against the use of force, which, then can yield—in specific, rule-defined cases—to an exception endorsing force. Johnson has often stated his view that such a construct is detrimental to the use of the just-war tradition and cannot be found in the classical authors. I think all would concede the last point and contest the first. Childress explicitly noted in his formulation of the requirements of the just-war ethic that he was using categories of modern moral philosophy to interpret an ancient tradition. To say Augustine and Aquinas did not use the categories does not demonstrate that using these corrupts their theories of legitimating war in defense of justice. Moreover, the substantive reason for placing a presumptive restraint on war as an instrument of politics is, in my view, entirely necessary. Both the instruments of modern war and the devastation of civilian society which has accompanied most contemporary conflicts provide good reasons to pause (analytically) before legitimating force as an instrument of justice.

Johnson finds systematic hesitation about endorsing "just wars" in modern papal teaching. He is surely correct about this. He is much less convincing when he identifies the roots of this position as a form of papal pacifism. The idea that either Vatican I or Pius XII was influenced by pacifism is, in my experience, an idiosyncratic reading of the Catholic tradition on war and peace. But these are controversies among scribes. This is a very good book on an important topic; it advances the normative debate. □

J. Bryan Hehir *is professor of the Practice in Religion and Society at Harvard's Divinity School and Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.*

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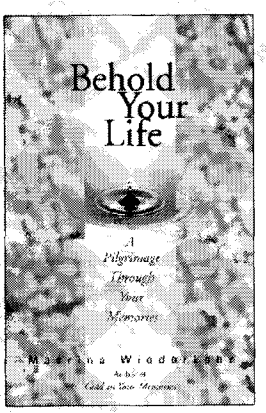

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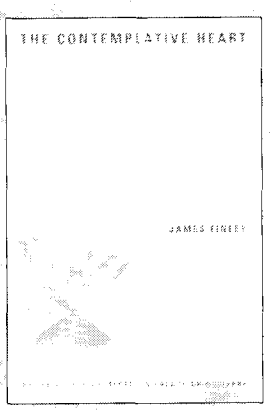

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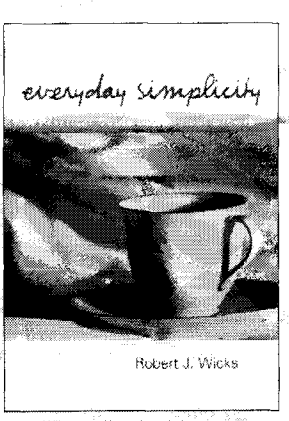

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JUST SAY NO

One Nation, Two Cultures
Gertrude Himmelfarb
Alfred A. Knopf, $23, 179 pp.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Recent events—such as last fall's furor over the publicly funded exhibit of a portrait of a dung-daubed Virgin Mary at the Brooklyn Museum; the defeat of state gambling in Alabama; the support for teaching creationism by the Kansas School Board; the popular outrage over Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura's attack on religion—focus fresh attention on America's culture wars.

Yet some question the very existence of the culture wars. In *One Nation, after All* (Viking, 1998), sociologist Alan Wolfe argued that such highly publicized controversies over cultural issues do not reflect the concerns of the middle-class suburbanites he interviewed. Quiet faith, and tolerance for almost everything, characterize their cultural outlook and, he implied, the outlook of most ordinary Americans.

In *One Nation, Two Cultures*, an elegant and beautifully economical essay, one of the nation's most distinguished cultural historians challenges this argument. Gertrude Himmelfarb says that the culture wars do exist, that they are deeply rooted in American political and religious tradition, and that they have had a largely salutary, if modest, impact on the society.

The title of her book, and some of its pointed criticism, are a rebuttal of Wolfe's thesis. Himmelfarb says that though we are one nation, politically indivisible, we are two cultures, divided over a set of fundamental beliefs on family, codes of sexual conduct, and the role of religion in the public square.

Himmelfarb traces the origins of this cultural divide to the 1960s and the countercultural revolution which challenged and eventually overturned traditional moral norms. This revolution was "magnified by other concurrent ones"—racial, sexual, technological, demographic, and psychological—and together these revolutions "fostered a growing disaffection with established institutions and authorities." Liberation brought benefits, especially for women and African-Americans, writes Himmelfarb, but its rewards were tempered by costs and casualties: "The counterculture intended to liberate everyone from the stultifying influence of 'bourgeois values,' also liberated a good many people from the values...that had a stabilizing, socializing, and moralizing effect on the society."

What Himmelfarb calls "the cultural contradictions of liberation," gave rise to two cultures, interacting and coexisting, but not entirely reconcilable. The dominant culture is dedicated to protecting and expanding the legacy of the culturally liberationist agenda. Its cultural outlook is secular, morally relativistic, and nonjudgmental. Think Terry Gross on NPR. Its leadership is concentrated in the cultural strongholds of the media and academy, but its followers represent the majority of Americans.

A smaller and weaker dissident culture, arising more recently, stands in fitful opposition to the dominant culture. Its leadership is concentrated among conservative religious activists, but its membership cuts across religious denominations and includes secularists who find their moral convictions at odds with the dominant culture. Its cultural outlook is rooted in religious faith and moral conviction as well as the concern that the traditional family, civility, childhood innocence, and respect for adult as well as institutional authority are eroding. Think Dr. Laura Schlessinger across the AM dial.

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If Himmelfarb makes a persuasive case for the existence of culture wars, she nonetheless rejects the media portrait of cultural dissenters as members of a dangerous, authoritarian, monolithic, Religious Right. These dissidents are far more democratic, religiously pluralistic, well-educated, and diffusely organized than their stereotype suggests. And members of the dissident culture include more traditional Democrats than people commonly think. African-Americans, who are left of center in their politics, are often in sympathy with cultural dissidents on matters like religious expression in the public square, premarital sexual abstinence, the breakdown of the family, and school vouchers. For example, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one of the nation's laboratories for school choice, 74 percent of African-Americans favor vouchers, according to a recent survey by the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*.

Himmelfarb concludes that the conflict between a dominant and a dissident culture has been mainly a good thing. Cultural dissent has tempered the socially utopian and culturally extremist views of the Left. She points out that no one today celebrates the glories of mind-expanding drugs or exploitative sex and violence in the media, as many did in the 1970s.

Moreover, out of this clash of cultures, she states, we have begun to forge a consensus on such difficult and contested issues as the breakdown of the nuclear family. "It is not only conservatives (religious and secular) who now deplore the breakdown of the family; liberals do as well...." Finally, she sees little chance that the culture wars will escalate into religious wars. Indeed, in the future, the dissident culture is likely to become more ecumenical and less sectarian, more moral and less religious, more diffuse and less focused. Yet even as it blurs and softens, cultural dissent will continue to influence the mainstream in myriad ways: "If there will be no mass conversion," she observes, "there will be individual conversions on important cultural issues."

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Perhaps because she surveys the cultural battlefield from Olympian heights, Himmelfarb sometimes makes cultural conflict seem rather more bloodless and dispassionate than it may be. And she fails to note at least one of the more obvious exceptions to her argument: For many conservatives, it is a matter of faith that the market responds to consumer pressures. Yet there is little evidence that organized protest or broad cultural consensus has had much impact, for example, on the television industry. Both elite and popular opinion on the right and left agree that television is too violent, too sexually exploitative, too harmful to children. Congressional critics on both sides of the aisle have used the bully pulpit to scold and shame media executives, advertisers, screenwriters; new grassroots organizations have formed to boycott advertisers and lobby local television stations; parents have picketed and pled for more wholesome shows. Media moguls hang their heads in what has become a ritual of penitence, promise to do better, but then return to the business of pushing the edge of the cultural envelope and generating more vulgarity, profanity, and raunchy sex with each new television season.

And I wonder whether Himmelfarb might not underestimate the dominant culture's capacity to have it both ways: to submit to cultural challenge the way a big brother tolerates a tussle with a little brother, but then to reassert power and prevail in the fight. If today's cultural dissent tends to lose its sharp and adversarial edge and to tilt away from sectarian religious belief toward softer moral complaint, it is fair to ask whether it rises to the level of a Fourth Great Awakening, as some suggest, or whether it will turn out to be nothing more than a modest midcourse correction. It is probably up to the younger generation to decide this question. In the meantime, this dazzling book gives us profound appreciation for our long tradition of moral self-scrutiny and offers us a way to measure and, yes, judge today's culture wars against the record of the past. □

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead *is the author of* The Divorce Culture *(Alfred A. Knopf).*

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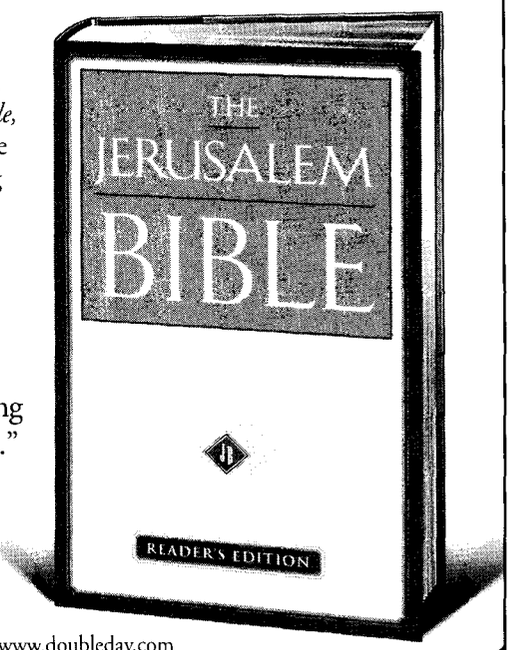

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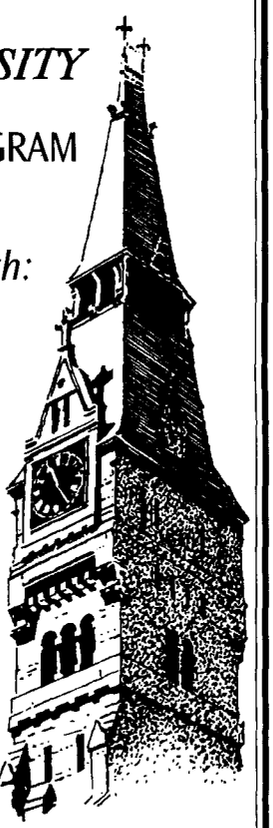

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GETTING LOWER

On Pilgrimage
Dorothy Day
Eerdmans, $16, 266 pp.

Patrick Jordan

In a recent conversation, a highly regarded historian made the remark that Dorothy Day was the most interesting person in the history of American Catholicism. I agreed, but should have added, "and the most challenging, the most provocative."

Last summer, the *New Yorker* (August 9, 1999) published a sixteen-page Richard Avedon portfolio, "The Sixties." There were Avedon portraits of Bob Dylan, Sly Stone, Gus Grissom, Janis Joplin, Julius Lester, and Bernadette Dohrn. Abbie Hoffman was captured giving the finger, and remarking to writer Doon Arbus: "I'm not against the war in Vietnam. I'm for the National Liberation Front winning. So I'm not for peace there." Following an icy triptych of rock musician Johnny Winter, there was a nearly two-page portrait of seventy-one-year-old Dorothy Day. It had been taken at the Milwaukee Catholic Worker in the fall of 1969. If not regal, Day appears patrician in a hand-me-down blouse and blazer. In contrast to many of the other subjects in the portfolio, Day looks directly into the camera with clear eyes and an implacable strength and serenity. Her shoulders, while stooped, remain squared. Wisps of white hair escape the wreath of her braids. Reading glasses dangle at an angle from a cord around her neck. Within several sentences she instructs Arbus about civil disobedience and the works of mercy: "You know, a lot of Catholic Workers go up in the world. And a lot of them go down in the world—to jail. I must say I have much more esteem for those who keep trying to get lower."

Trying to get lower is one of the themes of Day's 1948 book, *On Pilgrimage*. And in fact the book initially succeeded in doing just that as the first of several works published by the in-house Catholic Worker Books in the late 1940s. The December 1948 *Catholic Worker* announced the price for the 175-page paperback as $1.50. By the January 1949 issue of the paper, the cost had been lowered to $1. Eerdmans has just republished the book as part of its *ressourcement* in Catholic thought series. The small volume is based on some of Day's columns, articles, and notebooks for 1948, and includes a lengthy introduction by Mark and Louise Zwick, editors of the *Houston Catholic Worker*, which first appeared in *Communio* (Fall, 1997). As the Zwicks rightly point out, what is most relevant about this volume is not simply Day's prophetic writing and witness, but her spiritual depth and practice. How these intersect constitutes her enduring challenge.

On Pilgrimage is not Day's best book. She clearly profited from having an editor—her *The Long Loneliness* is a classic, and her *Loaves and Fishes* is a more coherent volume—but she seldom had one when preparing her columns for the monthly issue of the *Catholic Worker*. (The present collection suffers from a presumed familiarity on the part of her readers. We are not given help to understand first-name-only characters who sound quite intriguing. Who is this "Slim" she mentions who liked to call her *Führer*-ess to her face?) Nonetheless,

You Say Distance Means Nothing

Airplanes, automobiles, telephones, television, and telescopes,
they mean we can see everything,
reach out and put our fingers into any hole in the world.
And I say, "At a price."
Spice and disease know no boundaries.
Ideas go begging in every borough and village in the world,
begging money for shoes, for bicycles, cab fare, for passage
to the next shore.
Everything's portable—whole planets, whole galaxies.
And I say, "The world where you find everything
is the world where you escape nothing,"
I tell you, "As current travels down the line,
the wire drags back a bit of the power."
when what I mean to say
is that I'll miss you in New York,
even for three days, even with talking on the phone.
Now that everything's close but you're far away,
I'll miss your touch and the taste of your kiss.
When I come home I'll bring bagels,
and photographs of Central Park,
and stories of how dangerous Manhattan was
when I went there alone.

Bill Ayres

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this 1948 book is full of high-grade ore and some unforgettable passages that demonstrate not only Day's gripping reportage but her luminous humanity and spirit.

Particularly affecting are the pictures she paints while visiting her daughter's growing family on a small, dirt-poor farm in West Virginia: the warmth they share, not only on dark February nights in a frozen holler, but in the languid splendor of summer swims with her small grandchildren in a nearby creek. There is a searing description of the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, ghetto, with its overpowering smell of dead rats. Day eventually links the plight of those who suffer in America's wastelands with the pungent fruits of capitalism: "The stink of the world's injustice and the world's indifference is all around us," she says. And one senses it would be impossible to look her in the eye and presume to contradict her.

But this book is full not only of Day's passion for justice but her spiritual commitment and her own self-doubts and self-criticism. The latter were exacting companions that nevertheless worked to save Day from the self-righteousness endemic among inspired radicals, left or right. At fifty she writes, "I have always to struggle against self. I am not disillusioned with myself either. I know my talents and ability as well as failures. But I have done woefully little."

That, of course, would be true of most of us, but not Dorothy Day. Who else could write so authoritatively, "Let us rejoice in poverty, because Christ was poor"? "Let us love to live with the poor," she continues, "because they are specially loved by Christ. Even the lowest, most depraved—we must see Christ in them and love them to folly."

Day did, but with clear eyes, an active mind, engaged heart, fervent prayer, radical critique, and uncommon joy. We cannot but learn from her many pilgrimages, and this 1948 collection, circumscribed and limited though it may be, reveals something essential and timelessly challenging about her. □

Patrick Jordan *is the managing editor of* Commonweal.

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WITHOUT THE CORE

Eve
A Biography
Pamela Norris
New York University Press, $35, 496 pp.

Edward T. Wheeler

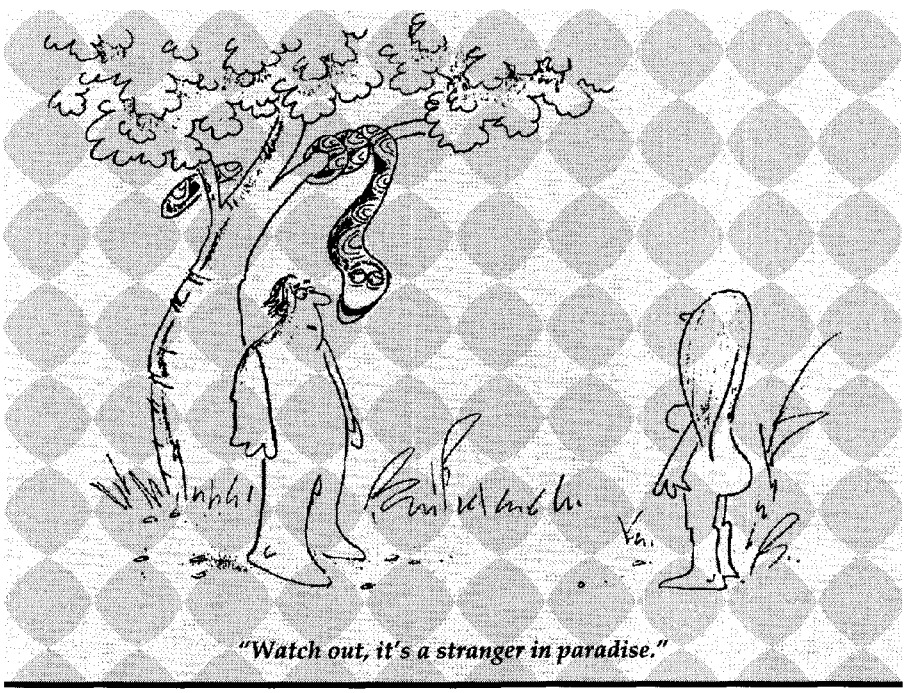
The first woman became the "blueprint for Woman, an explanation of her character and possibilities," writes the English critic Pamela Norris. That blueprint, Norris judges, is one of woeful subordination: "Ideas about male and female sexuality and the balance of power between the sexes derive from, one might say have been contaminated by, the prescriptions for human behavior formulated in the first centuries after Christ's death....Eve/ Woman stands accused of vanity, moral weakness, and sexual frailty, while Adam/Man's role in the transaction can be summarized by the familiar defense, 'She led him on.'"

Eve is divided into two sections. The first, "The Making of Bad Reputation," is a survey of the commentaries on the Genesis story, accompanied by accounts that illustrate how prescriptive notions of gender evolved with the rise of Christianity. The second, "Fantasies of Eve," looks at the way in which the tradition informed the imaginations of male and female artists from ancient times to the present—with female writers in contemporary works offering subversive retellings of the myth.

The book is well illustrated, and Norris is very well informed, easy to read, and extraordinarily unpolemical. Her range is impressive: ancient narratives and modern novels are deftly summarized, and Norris finds her way easily through the theological debates and offers allusions to a myriad of writers, critics, and painters. This is a very literary work with illustrative and thematic quotations from standard and non-traditional authors on virtually every page. Yet the text is neither dense nor rebarbative, and the author provides summaries of the argument as she proceeds from stage to stage. One could say the only surprise in the work is the lack of surprise, both in the indictment, never pushed too hard, of male privilege, and in the matter-of-fact way in which a tradition shaped fundamentally by the Christian church is now seen to exist wholly apart from religious questions of any sort.

The genial tone and resolutely unreligious perspective do, however, produce a certain leveling effect. For example, an account of the Cupid and Psyche myth (and the analogies to the Fall it provides) exists on the same plane with that of Augustine's struggles with the origin of evil in *The City of God*. Norris's retelling of the negative characterization of Woman throughout midrash and early Christian commentaries is unblinking, but she is gracious enough to see the writers as "respectable theologians, weighed down by scholarship and doctrinal responsibility, [registering that] the Paradise of youthful sexuality had indeed been lost forever." The context of the times provides understanding. Men are more blind than to be blamed. In that light, "The Terrible Flesh" may be Norris's best chapter. Here is the measured stance she takes: "It is tempting, when dealing with the attitude of the early church to Adam and Eve, to apply a pick-and-mix approach—to put in a thumb and pull out the ripe plums of misogyny, the damning phrase or polemical statement that seems to confirm wholesale prejudice against women, and in particular a deep suspicion of female sexuality. But the situation was more complex than such an approach would imply."

Norris reads Paul and Augustine well and, drawing on the work of Peter Brown and other scholars, indicates the particular attractions for women of virginity. The subsequent treatment of these themes in "Fantasies of Eve" takes up, among other re-embodiments of Eve, the Virgin Mary. Norris's prefacing remark, that in Mary "women were pledged to an ideal of behavior they could never realize....It seems a curious, malignant, and ridiculous sentence," suggests a lack of sympathy for the material that is generally absent in the rest of her book, but once again reveals certain basic presuppositions. We follow Norris through perceptive readings of



"Watch out, it's a stranger in paradise."

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works scattered throughout the canon, Milton, Christine de Pizan, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Anita Brookner....(But why no Wife of Bath? Surely this is a strange omission.) She ranges widely and reads well. Again her plot summaries often untangle in illuminating ways, the intertwining of the myth of Adam and Eve and their contemporary settings. She does a reader service in pushing the analysis as deftly as she does.

According to Norris, the contemporary goal for woman emerging out of the story of the Fall is "to have knowledge and the garden." Under the tutelage of this updated Eve, women can consider "the difficult choices and compromises of adult life, the requirement to balance exploration and individuation with social and family demands." The concluding chapters that allow Norris's Eve to throw off the yoke of traditional interpretation point to the full expression of women's sexuality and creativity without the stigma of temptation or Original Sin.

This is a thoroughly secular book, and its most overt judgments are essentially aesthetic. The moral subtext is enlightened liberation in a strictly material world. There is no intersection of the timeless with time nor does the story of Eve and her daughters find resonance in sacrament. What a peculiar feeling it is to end a book whose very weight of written and iconographic evidence points to a devotional Christian tradition that militates against the argument. Ironically, at least for Christian readers, the lack of stridency in Pamela Norris's analysis is built on an assurance of that tradition's irrelevance; there is no belief in an order external to the self, transcendent, and shepherded as opposed to merely enjoined by the church. As *Commonweal*'s recent discussion of Catholic liberalism has underscored (November 19, 1999), the *sponsa Christi* has not "articulated a broadly persuasive vision of women's roles within and without the church." This "biography" of Eve, in its deracinated analysis of the tradition, makes the need for articulation seem that much more acute. □

Edward T. Wheeler *is dean of faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

SEEING GREEN

Thinking Ecologically
The Next Generation of Environmental Policy
Edited by Marian R. Chertow and Daniel C. Esty
Yale University Press, $16, 271 pp.

All Creation Is Groaning
An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe
Edited by Carol J. Dempsey and Russell A. Butkus
The Liturgical Press, $27.95, 313 pp.

Redeeming the Time
A Political Theology of the Environment
Stephen Bede Scharper
Continuum Publishing Company, $16.95, 240 pp.

Robert Jaquay

In writing about the environment, the breadth and complexity of the subject allows for a wide range of approaches. In that context, reading these three remarkable, contrasting books brought to mind a scene from the film *Inherit the Wind*. The protagonist Henry Drummond (played consummately by Spencer Tracy) stands alone, the last person in the courtroom. Fresh from victory defending a high-school biology teacher prosecuted for presenting the theory of evolution to his students, the lawyer pauses in gathering up his things to contemplate two books central to the controversy. In one hand lies Darwin's *Origin of Species;* the Bible is held in the other. Mentally more than physically, Drummond is seen weighing the secular with the sacred.

Thinking Ecologically, the secular book in this imperfect analogy, ambitiously seeks to reorient this nation's frequently contentious debate between deregulation advocates who wish to scrap antipollution programs wholesale and environmentalists who believe such a change of direction is neither needed nor possible. The chapter-by-chapter presentation of "new generation" ideas is offered not so much as middle ground between opposing forces, but as higher ground where more productive discourse is possible.

These new ideas result from a two-year initiative of the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy involving hundreds of experts from around the country (many consciously from "outside the beltway") and a wide array of backgrounds (highway planners, business leaders, scientists, city managers, environmentalists, consumer advocates, farmers—among others). Two major conferences, fourteen workshops, and dozens of papers are distilled into fifteen chapters—each a separately written essay—edited and arranged into a coherent, accessible form.

A volume of essays written by numerous contributors can demand more of a reader than a book written in a single voice. In addition to varying writing styles and subject matter (including land use, the effect of the automobile, the process of goods production, the service-based economy, globalization, technology, private financing for sustainable development, market-based incentives, advances in the science of measurement, and so on), chapters in such a collection tend to be more direct and intensely information-packed than those in a book prepared by a single set of authors. However, if skillfully brought together—as *Thinking Ecologically* is—the reader will be rewarded for the extra effort required.

Editors Marian R. Chertow and Daniel C. Esty introduce their book with a

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frankly stated premise. Potential for further environmental progress under "first generation" policies emphasizing pollution prevention is limited. Under this structure (created by a series of federal statutes such as The Clean Air Act and The Clean Water Act), the editors write, environmental problems are attacked in compartmentalized fashion with overly rigid regulation. This structure invites endless litigation and results in compliance that is literal—precisely to the minimum thresholds prescribed by law, and no more. It is better, they argue, to adopt a policy framework that is collaborative rather than confrontational, more comprehensive as opposed to fragmented, less crisis-driven and more responsive to context and circumstance.

Representative of the many cogent ideas brought forth in this volume is the notion of "industrial ecology." By understanding the flow of materials and energy in the production and consumption of goods, the effect on the environment will be better understood and constructive courses of action for firms, government, and individuals can be set accordingly. Industrial ecology leads to a more holistic, longer-term assessment of environmental threats than does the current concentration on a specific type of pollutant or to problems arising at a particular point of production. In practice this approach would emphasize a firm's incorporation of environmental objectives in the engineering of a manufacturing process or design of a product, thus establishing a "green supply chain." Charles Powers and Marian Chertow, authors of this particular chapter, argue that such systems' approaches should form the foundation for the next generation of U.S. environmental policy. They offer seemingly practical views on what may well be a rocky transition from current pollutant-focused regulation.

It is too soon to determine whether *Thinking Ecologically* will succeed in altering the national policy debate. One of the principal intended audiences for this work will not be determined until the November elections. Nonetheless, it is already obvious that this book provides a wealth of substantive notions sure to be heard in the future.

All Creation Is Groaning is also an edited collection of essays exhorting a less compartmentalized, more connected examination of environmental concerns. This book, however, involves the collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts of a single faculty, the University of Portland.

Fourteen essays, each of which could stand alone, are drawn together and unified by means of a biblical passage chosen and theological reflection written specifically for each chapter. Topics range across the university's curriculum: hunger and food production; cartography of population, various pollutants, and biodiversity; global politics and the environment; nurturing a sense of environmental ethics in children; nature reflected in classical music, among others.

Taking its title from the Epistle to the Romans, *All Creation Is Groaning* is decidedly Judeo-Christian in orientation. It is also sufficiently open-minded for a concisely written Islamic perspective on the environment, contributed by Khalid

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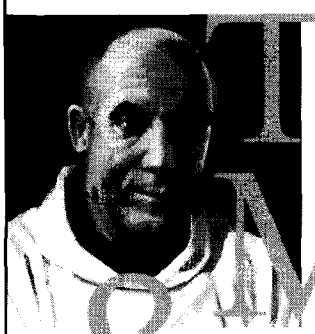

Thomas Merton & the Monastic Vision

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM

Though the outlines of Thomas Merton's life are generally known to his many readers, the details of his spiritual development are less familiar. Taking up where Merton's own *Seven Storey Mountain* ends, this penetrating biography by Lawrence Cunningham explores Merton's monastic life and his subsequent growth into a modern-day spiritual master.

Cunningham shows that Merton's prolific writings and his continuing influence can only be understood against the background of his contemplative experience as a Trappist monk. "If one does not understand Merton as a monk," writes Cunningham, "one does not understand Merton at all."

Adding to the interest of this balanced and reliable biography is a foreword by Father Timothy Kelly, the current abbot of the Abbey of Gethsemani, who was himself a novice under Merton.

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Khan, associate dean of Portland's School of Engineering. "According to the Islamic way of thinking...the role of the human race on this planet is that of caretaker and responsible husband of all the creatures and world's resources." Educating Western students about the Koran's legal and ethical reasoning concerning the protection of creation is practical ecumenism that seeds long-term global environmental progress.

Stephen Scharper's *Redeeming the Time*, briefly noted here, is a comprehensive review of Christian writing on the ecological crisis—a literature which has burgeoned since the 1970s. Usually defining his terms as he goes, Scharper examines numerous concepts. The Gaia hypothesis, for example, regards the entire range of living matter on earth as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs, and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts. Process theology, through which creation is viewed as a constantly evolving reflection of an all-loving God, rather than as a finished product of an all-powerful deity, is considered in another chapter. Liberation theology, with its preferential option for the poor, is carefully described and acknowledged by Scharper for its sizable effect on his thinking.

Redeeming the Time concludes with a call for a new "political theology"—a highly abstract integration of previously reviewed concepts and a refinement of language that, unlike preceding chapters, avoids concise definition but at least suggests attributes of a constructive dialogue dealing with the environment. Scharper describes this political theology of the environment as a program of action and reflection that seeks to unite the awe inspired by nature's grandeur with concern for the effects of environmental degradation on the poorest and most vulnerable. Within this framework, morality is just as important as biology.

Both *All Creation Is Groaning* and *Redeeming the Time* emphasize the moral and ethical dimensions of the debate on the environment. Such discussion is by its nature more absolute than the policy debates contained in *Thinking Ecologically*. There, sensitivity to necessary tradeoffs and constituency building sufficient for political and economic progress are implicit. Fortunately, choosing one perspective over the other is not necessary. Neither is perfect: The moral approach isn't likely to lead directly to implementable solutions; the economic approach could easily shortchange future needs in the press of immediate concerns. Yet, considered together, these varying perspectives on environmental progress positively affect one another—the economic isn't so ruthless, the moral becomes increasingly pragmatic.

In the final moments of *Inherit the Wind*, Henry Drummond looks up from his thoughts on the secular and the sacred. With a resigned half-smile, half-shrug, he slaps the two books together, stuffs them into his briefcase, then strides, bag in hand, through the courthouse door. *Thinking Ecologically*, *Redeeming the Time*, and *All Creation Is Groaning* are companions of the same sort. □

Robert Jaquay *is associate director of The George Gund Foundation, a private philanthropy in Cleveland, Ohio. He writes frequently on urban sprawl, sustainable development, and other environmental topics.*

A SCHOLAR'S LEGACY

Problems Unique to the Holocaust
Edited by Harry James Cargas
University of Kentucky Press, $20, 198 pp.

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr.

When President Jimmy Carter sought someone of the Jewish faith to chair the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission, he turned to Elie Wiesel. When he sought a Catholic to serve on this commission, he found a good one in the late Harry James Cargas, who died in 1998. When Israelis wanted a Catholic to serve on the international advisory board of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center in Jerusalem, Cargas was the logical choice. In recognition of Cargas's prolific scholarly work (more than twenty books and scores of articles) and his enormous service to improving Jewish-Christian relations, the Jewish National Fund bestowed on him its Tree of Life Award. Five thousand trees planted in his name now grow outside Jerusalem in a parkland.

Cargas was indefatigable in forging links between Jews and Catholics. People who didn't talk to one another spoke with Harry Cargas, and his intimate interviews with them enabled his readers to hear these scholars as though they were in dialogue with one another. His best-known book, *Reflections of a Post-Auschwitz Christian* (1989), is an open letter to Pope John Paul II written shortly after the pope's meeting with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim. Not content to quarrel with the pope over a particular incident, Cargas went for much higher stakes, cataloguing the church's anti-Semitism over the centuries. For example, in the fourth century the church aligned itself with emperors who removed from Roman law the very exemptions for Jews that had enabled early Christians to survive as a minority, free for the most part from the general duty of emperor worship and from other conflicts with their consciences. In the seventh century the church even forbade Christians to consult with Jewish doctors, a teaching no Catholic would now take seriously. The eleventh century witnessed a new Christian attitude toward war: that it could be divinely inspired, or at least papally commended, if not commanded. As it happened, the Crusaders drew first blood not in the "Holy Land" but in the Rhineland, where they slaughtered thousands of Jews. They did

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worse when they got to the city of peace, locking its Jews into a synagogue and burning it to the ground. In subsequent centuries Christians expelled the Jews from England in 1290, from France in 1394, and from Spain in 1492.

Cargas was famous for his rigorous honesty as a historian. Ten years ago he urged the Vatican to open its archives on Pius XII to independent historians, a much better antidote for biased or shoddy history than selective publication of some of the evidence. Always identifiably Catholic, Cargas preferred to describe himself not as a Roman Catholic, but as a post-Auschwitz one. He did so to preserve the memory of the Nazi desecration of human dignity.

If there is a single word that marks Cargas's work, it is "moving." He enabled people to change even closed minds and hardened hearts. In *Shadows of Auschwitz* (1990), for example, he artfully selected powerful images of the Shoah. His gentleness as a teacher shines through the effective, understated questions he poses for his readers as they confront visual evidence of atrocities.

Problems Unique to the Holocaust is an anthology in which historians and philosophers, scholars of art, literature, and religion argue in various ways that the Shoah entailed so profound a collapse of universal moral truths that one must suspend all judgment about the acts and omissions of its victims. Realistic assumptions in normal life became "optimistic, mistaken, fateful, and deadly" in the Nazi killing centers. Where pregnancy was neither "a medical condition nor a blessing from God" but "a capital crime" in the death camps, can standard ethical reasoning on abortion be of much value? Or what is one to make of parents who "smothered their own babies whose cries otherwise would have revealed their secret positions"? Are suicides in the death camps really suicides or Nazi murders?

"Dare we throw stones?" asks Cargas. David Patterson replies: "Any moral judgment of the actions undertaken by inmates of the Nazi death camps must begin with an acknowledgment of our tenuous position as judges in these matters. Those of us who have not seen the inside of the sealed trains, who have not been covered with the ashes of our mothers and fathers and children raining down from the sky...can hardly presume to peer into these souls under assault and make moral pronouncements upon them."

The essays in this book encapsulate the shift toward empathy that characterized its editor's work as an ethicist. If one is moved to compassion, to suffer together with others, one cannot easily sit in judgment on them, let alone repeat centuries-old venomous condemnations. In the case of Christian hatred for Jews, such judgments proved to be as poisonous of Christianity as they were destructive of their intended victims.

The book is better read in small doses to enable it to sink in. But it can be read in a single day. Ash Wednesday would be a good time for Christians to do so. The ashes marking our foreheads on that day serve as a paradoxical remembrance of a future event, our death. That remembering enables us to prepare for the future by turning from a past that

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is sinful. The Hebrew word for this is *teshuvah*.

This book is Harry Cargas's last. We will all miss his clarion voice stirring our consciences and continuously urging us never to forget the events of the Holocaust. Such a call to remembering remains the most effective guarantee that it will never happen again. □

Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr., *a frequent contributor, is professor of law at Valparaiso Law School in Valparaiso, Indiana.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Although I have been annoyed by certain Catholic religious practices, I have never been inclined to abandon my faith. I am convinced that our society needs the perspective of those who reflect traditional Catholic values. Our concern to be "hip and intelligent and modern" should not preclude us from distinguishing between superficial religious practices and the priceless values of our heritage.

JOHN F. O'CONNOR
Winchester, Mass.

Throwing dice

As a biologist studying evolution at the molecular level, I found John F. Haught's comments on Darwinism and theology ["Evolution and God's Humility," January 28] of great interest. However, like many commentators on the evolution-creation issue, Haught is hampered by a very old-fashioned view of evolutionary biology, essentially that of the premolecular era in biology. This old-fashioned view is perpetuated by popular writers like Richard Dawkins and is implicitly accepted by many anti-evolutionary writers such as Michael Behe.

In fact, Behe and Dawkins have much in common. They share a philosophical framework dating from the Enlightenment, which has little in common with the Christian philosophical tradition or with the Hebrew Scriptures. This philosophy views nature as a mechanism, and the goal of both scientist and philosopher is to explain how the mechanism works. The theistic approach holds that certain aspects of the living world (in Behe's view, cellular biochemistry) are so complex that no natural mechanism can account for their origin, while the contrary view claims that natural mechanisms (natural selection) are at least in principle sufficient to explain all aspects of life. Both sides assume an essentially deterministic, mechanistic view of nature. Interestingly, "intelligent design" champions like William Dembski adduce as incontrovertible evidence of divine creation the very same facts that certain biologists cite as evidence for the ubiquitous working of natural selection.

However, what we are discovering about biology at the molecular level is that organisms are far from the well-designed machines assumed by both Behe and Dawkins. Rather, molecular biology reveals a colossal waste of resources, a myriad of complex Rube

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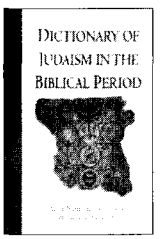

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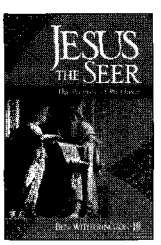

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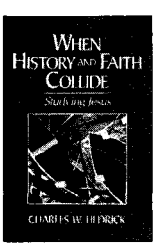

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Goldberg-like ways of getting things done, and the accumulated residue of past evolutionary dead ends. Evolution seems to proceed not by design but by chance and serendipity. If life is "intelligently designed," one might well question the intelligence, not to mention the sanity, of the designer.

As usual, the historians of ideas have got it all wrong. It was not the agnostic Darwin who had the "dangerous idea" in nineteenth-century biology. Darwin's mechanistic view of evolution fit in well with the Enlightenment presuppositions of his vaguely theistic precursors. Rather, it was the Catholic Gregor Mendel who propounded the truly radical and dangerous idea. Mendel showed that every act of sexual reproduction is set up as a lottery. Contrary to Einstein's famous objection to the quantum theory ("God does not throw dice"), God does indeed throw dice at every fertilization. It was left for Sewall Wright and, most importantly, Motoo Kimura in the twentieth century to work out the population implications of Mendelian genetics. What their models predicted—and what molecular biology has confirmed—is a biological world in which not design (intelligent or otherwise) but chance rules.

Does this pose a problem for theology? Personally, I don't think so. First, the Mendelian-Kimuran revolution can be beneficial in breaking the stranglehold of Enlightenment philosophy on the creation-evolution issue. Protestant fundamentalism in particular, in spite of its claim to be scripturally based, accepts a world view far more indebted to the Enlightenment than it is to either the Bible or the Christian tradition. As Haught suggests, a theology that is genuinely scriptural can accommodate itself easily to a God who is no watchmaker. In addition, it is important to keep in mind the distinction, well known to Catholic philosophy since Aquinas, between natural science and philosophy—a distinction ignored both by atheistic evolutionists who think that evolution "disproves" the existence of God and by the "intelligent design" school who think that divine design can be a testable scientific hypothesis.

AUSTIN L. HUGHES
Columbia, S.C.

The author is professor of biological sciences at the University of South Carolina.

The author replies:

Professor Hughes is correct in saying that biology is still too often presented in an obsolete mechanistic format, and that theological encounters with evolution are therefore hampered by having to deal with this version. In fact, the theological objections to Dawkins or Behe have to do not with science but with the confining metaphysical assumptions underlying much of science. Even after Mendel and Kimura, however, I doubt that we can plausibly go so far as to make life simply a matter of chance. Even a nonmechanistic interpretation of life requires an ingredient of order with the serendipity.

JOHN F. HAUGHT

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Discovering fire

I am always glad to get my *Commonweal* magazine and particularly enjoyed John Haught's "Evolution & God's Humility." I strongly agree that different images of God and related theologies are necessary for us not only to deal with scientific discoveries and realities, but also to deal with age-old questions of how God can allow pain, suffering, and evil. Ideas of a relational God of compassionate love, who is with us but separate from us and is calling all of creation to a vision and a future that we all participate in creating, provide a hopeful and invigorating set of images of God, of creation, and of us as human beings.

Such a set of images is not refuted by evolutionary materialists who think we are a random result of chemical and biological processes. They are probably right that human beings are the result of those evolutionary processes.

But that is all they can and should say about human beings. The nature of our destiny is not within the scope of science. Teilhard de Chardin once said, "The day will come when after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire."

Science is understanding and harnessing the wind, and tides, etc. It is up to all of us as human beings to harness for God the energies of love and continue to truly bring about a new creation. Haught's theology will help get us there.

ROBERT BEEZAT
Glendale, Wis.

God as parent

As its title suggests, John F. Haught's "Evolution & God's Humility" seems to be as much about our image of God as about Darwin's theories. Images of God can invite reflection on how we live our lives, and Haught's image of a God who embraces evolution strikes me, a father of college-age children, as a model for being a parent.

As a parent of emerging adults, I lack the control of an "intelligent designer." However, I feel called, as Haught puts it, into the "realm of an open and incalculable future." There, as Haught says about God's work, my children stand "ontologically distinct" from me and not as "a simple extension" of me. Like the God Haught describes, I must concede to my progeny their "own autonomous principles of operation," and release them "into the realm of liberty," where they become "more and more independent," and where I watch their "own internal coherence intensify, not diminish."

When loving a young adult, the "intelligent designer" risks being self-serving and less the effective lover Haught calls our "humble God." As a parent, I am grateful for this God's example.

TIM REULAND
Aurora, Ill.

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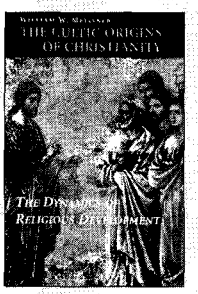

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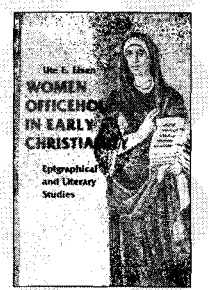

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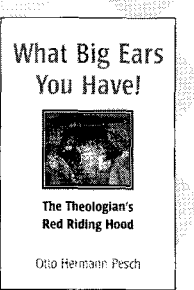

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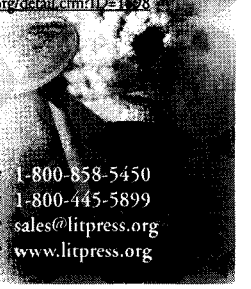

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A 'WING' & A PRAYER

Peter Feuerherd

Some may swoon for the heroic Senator John McCain of Arizona. Others might go for Bill Bradley, George W., or "you can call me Al." But this year I am declaring my support for Josiah Bartlet, the first religiously serious Catholic to sit in the Oval Office. Well, not exactly the Oval Office, but the close-enough-facsimile used in the NBC drama "The West Wing."

Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen, is a moderately liberal Democrat. The series is a look at the inner workings of a make-believe White House which, in many respects, is a lot like a certain recent administration. Young and self-assured staff members stalk the corridors, jockey for position, flirt, philosophize, rationalize, and play political hardball every week.

The television administration, however, seems to have one advantage over the real-life kind: It is led by a grown-up. President Bartlet is prone to quote medieval philosophers, worries about the dating life of his nineteen-year-old daughter as well as the possibility of nuclear war on the Indian subcontinent, and is a thoughtful, practicing Catholic.

The hints were there early on; he wore a Notre Dame sweatshirt, his daughter attended Georgetown, and he quoted Augustine when confronted with a crisis. He is progressive yet cautious: unenthusiastic about a graphic sex-education report—his religious sensitivities about sex are derided by some on his staff as a lack of political will to deal with teen pregnancy and AIDS—he is willing to take Congress to the mat on gun control.

He is no saint. When confronted with terrorism, he needs to be reminded by his Pentagon about just-war theory and proportionality. And one wonders about the state of his marriage (the First Lady seems hardly ever to be around). But when she does show up, he can hardly keep his hands off her, so something positive must be going on, if one subscribes to Andrew Greeley's theories about religious Catholics and the positive role of sex in their marriages.

Sheen, who took his acting name from the famous television archbishop, is, of course, Hollywood's most prominent Catholic social activist. But his presidential character is not an activist. He is a politician, attempting to forge social justice in incremental ways. Sometimes he succumbs to political pressure, sacrificing moral principle for political expediency.

Not till the February 9 episode, the fourteenth in the series, did his religious preference become explicit. He ponders, while fingering rosary beads as a midnight deadline nears, whether to spare the life of a prisoner about to be executed for a federal crime. What makes this episode different is that the writers are willing to gamble that viewers will sit through a somewhat sophisticated explanation of what religious tradition has to say on the question.

Bartlet wanders the White House seeking counsel—a Jewish speechwriter and a Quaker visitor tell him to spare the man. The speechwriter provides perspective from the Talmud, noting that the ancient tradition cautioned against mere men playing God by taking human life to preserve civil order. The speechwriter's rabbi cautions that this president could never, of course, call the pope for advice for fear of resurrecting that old canard about the Vatican controlling a Catholic president.

A nonreligious perspective is taken by one argument in favor of execution. Bartlet's likable young personal aide knows what it is to want vengeance. His mother, a D.C. police officer, was murdered by a thug. He'd be willing to personally execute his mother's killer, he confides to the president. In the end, Bartlett declines to stay the execution. His religious views tell him otherwise, but he is overwhelmed by the 71 percent of his constituency who don't agree with the pope on the matter.

The episode gives us characters who, for the most part, take religious tradition seriously. They are willing to say that their faith has an impact on how they do their very public jobs. Sometimes, as in real life, the perspectives are irreconcilable.

Bartlet prays and worries that God doesn't hear him. That his business is run out of the White House doesn't make him above these concerns. He is an engaging example of a lay, post-Vatican II Catholic, on prime time.

One wonders, of course, where "The West Wing" will take us. How does this Catholic president, for example, view abortion? His very trendy staff is sure to be solidly prochoice; Bartlet's stance has so far remained a mystery. Will he take on the sacred cows of the creative Hollywood elite which has created him?

I remain optimistic. The February 9 episode concludes with Bartlet on his knees in the Oval Office confessing to a priest, played appropriately by Karl Malden, whose swaggering visage in *On the Waterfront* is perhaps the most compelling movie portrait of an American cleric. It's as if Malden has retired from berating New York waterfront gangsters to a quiet ministry for one very prominent parishioner.

That picture of the president in prayer is a change from the stories we got used to hearing about the Oval Office over the past few years. It's implied that Bartlet is confessing a sin of omission, a failure to act justly even when reminded by modern prophets that God's ways don't always adhere to poll results. □

Peter Feuerherd *is a frequent* Commonweal *contributor.*

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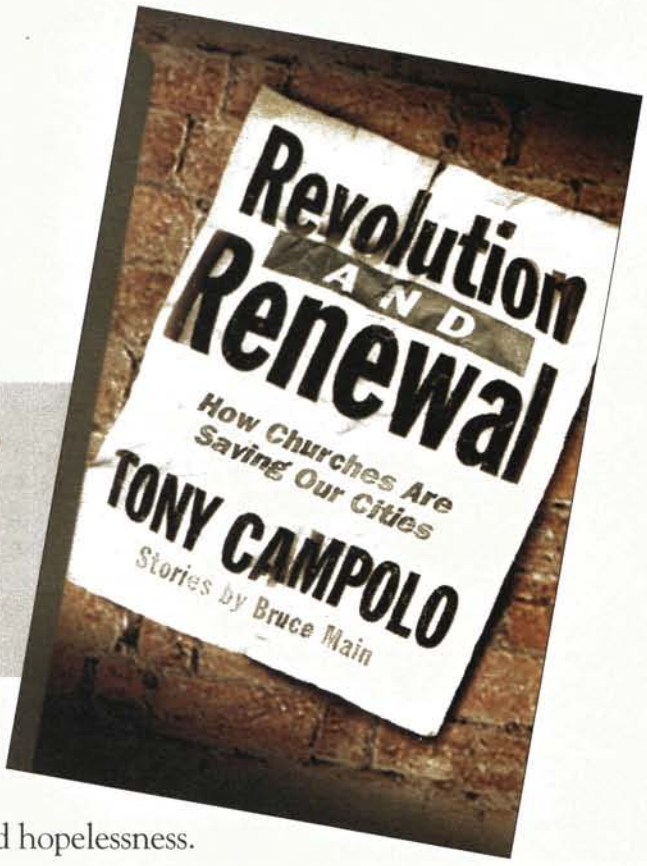

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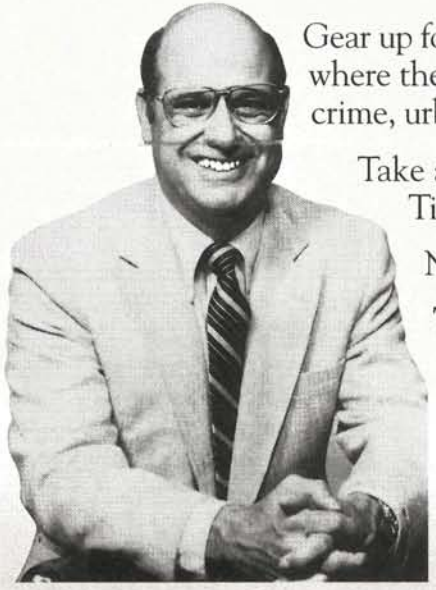

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